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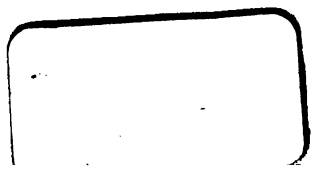
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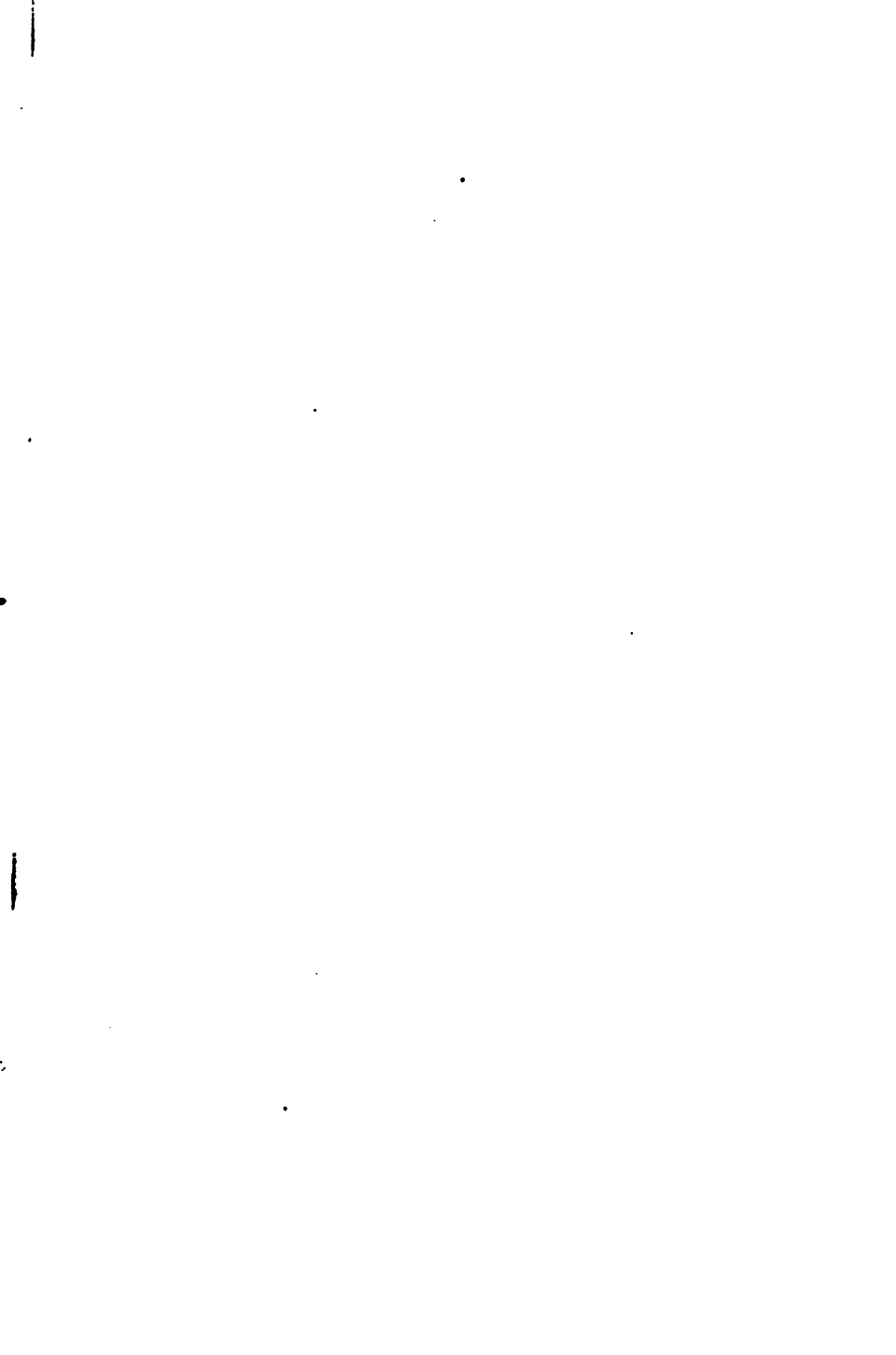
A LIVING LEGACY

Ruth Underwood



NE 1749







"I LOVE YOU NOW," SHE SAID.

A LIVING LEGACY

BY
RUTH UNDERWOOD

Illustrated by
GEORGE GIBBS



PHILADELPHIA
THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY

1912

KE 1749



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CHAPTER I

A DIFFICULT SITUATION

“**G**OOD MORNING, John; I see I have a big mail this morning.”

The speaker seated himself at the breakfast table and drew his letters toward him. A thin blue envelope protruded ever so little in the middle of the pile, but his quick eye caught it at once, and he pounced upon it and tore it open with an unsteady hand. John Patterson, the butler (who had never gone by any title but that of “waiter-man” in the long years he had been in Mrs. Brown’s service), watched his master with some anxiety for a moment, and then quietly withdrew to the pantry; while John Brown read the short note through two or three times. Finally he rose and went to the window. As he stood in deep thought looking out on his miniature English garden, one saw that he was almost a giant in height, and indeed his very plain face topped a figure six feet six in his stockings, only relieved from painful thinness and angularity by some hundred and fifty pounds of solid brawn. He had been nicknamed “Samson” at college, and the name had clung, though there was little about him to suggest an athlete. He carried himself badly, and the tendency to stoop, and general lack of spring

in his gait, made him look like a man well into middle life; and those who did not know that on this May morning, a quarter of a century ago, he was within a few days of his thirty-fourth birthday, would have reckoned him full ten years older.

His grave, unseeing gaze was suddenly withdrawn from the window at the sound of his name, and he turned to meet his mother. No one would have thought her his mother, for the one feature they had had in common, the thick, blue-black hair, had changed with her to iron gray; but the accustomed way in which he kissed her cheek, as he abstractedly drew back her chair, bespoke a habit of such long standing that it had become automatic. She noticed the mechanical response to her "good-morning," and looked at him with the same affectionate concern that had clouded John Patterson's broad face a few minutes before.

"Have you had bad news, John?" She glanced at the open letter in his hand.

"Dick Farnham is at home, Mother, and I am afraid from this," glancing down at the few unsteady lines, "in a very serious condition. He is at the old house, and of course he wants to see me at once. If I can attend to your business this morning, and get your reservations, I will have a bite of lunch down town and go right out to Germantown. He doesn't say when he arrived, but he is terribly knocked up by the journey, and evidently not fit to write."

"Why did he come home so unexpectedly? I suppose, now, you won't think of going abroad yourself?" Mrs. Brown's voice was not without a note of

satisfaction. The prospect of sparing her son for three months to this invalid wanderer had been a mountain on her horizon, and Dick Farnham, John's oldest friend, and the dearer of the only two who had ever found their way to his "sanctum sanctorum," had never been a favorite with his mother.

"Of course not!" The matter plainly seemed to him self-evident. "But I can't think why he didn't let me know his plan. I could have gone over to be with him on the home journey. The doctor they have had so long came over with them, but he is going right back. I should have been so thankful to go."

He helped himself to the bacon and eggs which John Patterson solicitously offered, but seemed to have no mind for eating. His face, in repose, was often a sad one, and bore a frequently noted likeness to the younger, beardless portraits of Lincoln. The long, deep-set eyes generally passed for black; but he who had had leisure and interest to scrutinize would have found them yellowish hazel, overshadowed by the heavy black brows and lashes. They were both keen and kindly, and, together with his large mouth which had a trick of pulling crooked when he smiled, and trembling when he was deeply moved, made his face one that inspired universal confidence.

"Dick Farnham ought to know that you would do anything in the world for your friends." His mother spoke with a touch of resentment at what she always considered John's tendency to let himself be imposed upon.

"He knows I would do anything in the world for *him*." He repeated her words with gentle emphasis.

This friend, who was not in Mrs. Brown's good books, had been for many years an exile, but the old feeling toward him was still strong within her. She saw that characteristic trembling of John's lips, and knew herself on dangerous ground, but there was something she was burning to say, which must come out at any cost. She would lead up to it gradually.

"Didn't Dick know of your plan to spend the summer with him?"

"No, I didn't want to say anything about it, I might so easily have been prevented," he did not say "as I have been so many times," but Mrs. Brown supplied the omission with a guilty twinge; "and when a man is tied up to such monotonous days as his, he builds on the least thing in an abnormal way, and would be terribly disappointed."

Mrs. Brown saw that she was not coming to her point on these lines, and thought best to make a short cut. She was always a little afraid of those long, keen eyes that saw through every subterfuge.

"There is one thing I hope you will never consent to do for him, if he should dream of asking you." She saw danger signals in his face, but seized her courage in both hands: "Has he ever spoken to you about the guardianship of the child?"

It was out at last, and she breathed more freely. John hesitated, and his color rose slightly; she saw she had hit the mark.

"Perhaps not in so many words," he said with an evident effort, "but I know he would like to leave her in my care—if anything should happen,—and no doubt it is on his mind. That may have been what

made him venture the trip home. But, Mother," he looked up and met her eyes squarely, "if Dick had *ten* children, and wanted to leave them all in my care, I would willingly accept the trust."

He spoke almost with passion, but his sense of humor was not proof against the consternation on his mother's comely face. A twinkle appeared in his eye, and one corner of his mouth drew up a little. "And I dare say I should make a mess of it," he added.

"We should be rather crowded if you saw fit to bring them all here," Mrs. Brown said stiffly. Her sense of humor was hard to touch.

"Now, Mother, be sensible!" The smile died out and his face took on its former gravity: "You know it would never occur to me to bring a child here to live."

"I should be very fond of *your* children," she hastened to say with some asperity; "but a strange child is a very different thing, and this used to be a dreadfully self-willed, spoiled one. Her grandmother once told me that she had many anxious hours over Mary's future, and you never denied that she refused to go to school. Imagine a child's deciding that she won't go to school, and her father's just giving in to her! It was the greatest piece of weakness I ever heard of, and you could never give any excuse for it that I remember. With such an example in his wife! But there, I've talked it over often enough and I can always see that you think I'm prejudiced, and—" John rose quietly from his almost untasted breakfast and went out of the room. His mother seemed to find no appetite for hers. She started up as though she would

follow him, but sat down again, heavily, wiping away some natural tears of vexation and remorse. How many times she had repressed the wish to speak on this subject for fear of being led on to give too energetic expression to her feelings! Nothing corrodes like "righteous" indignation that sees no hope of justifying itself in the only quarter where justification matters. Her heart was full to bursting. "Any jury of sensible people" would have pronounced her absolutely in the right; but this one Quixotic, loyal nature was as much outside her influence as he was inside the very core of her heart. The door opened behind her, and she felt John's hand on her shoulder. "I am sorry to have been so impatient," he said huskily; "but I was upset by the letter."

"Oh, John!" The poor lady's tears gushed forth anew; but what John always dreaded as following any apology on his part—a reopening of the whole case—did not come this time. She felt she had gone too far, and hastened to say, as she dried her eyes and composed her face: "I ought not to have spoken so to you of Dick just now."

John patted her shoulder, and changed the subject by asking whether she had decided to take her section for Wednesday or Thursday.

"I think I will say Thursday," she said with a final sniff. "Wednesday's meeting is a very important one and I ought not to miss it." Mrs. Brown was an ardent worker on the Women's Auxiliary Board of Missions of Holy Trinity Church, and she was always sorry that she could not awaken her otherwise exemplary and philanthropic son to a more active

interest in this inspiring subject. He good-humoredly told her that he was in the midst of so much need nearer home, it had a tendency to make him near-sighted, but she was inclined to set his lukewarmness down to Dick Farnhan's influence. She told herself that she could easily have forgiven Dick his apostasy to the Quaker faith of his fathers, if only he had joined himself to some other Evangelical body—she was not bigoted enough to require the Episcopal Communion—but she had always feared his companionship for John.

If she had been capable of reading her own heart she would have seen lurking at the bottom of her distrust a long-harbored spark of jealousy dating from the time when she began to discover Dick's power over the younger boy—there were some four years between them. She could not mention a single time when he had led John astray in *action*, but she had felt that he might in "*opinions*," it had always given her a sharp pang to see John with his arm about the neck of this boy friend who so easily won what she knew herself incapable of winning.

Did God ever make a purer bond than the friendship of the big boy and the little boy, with its protecting chivalry on the one side, and frank hero-worship on the other? Separation had never weakened the tie between these two, though they had seldom been together since Dick left Haverford in his junior year (before John entered) and went to the Boston "Tech." to study civil engineering.

John's heart was full of a mixture of feelings after he left his mother.

An only son, he had had one sister whom he loved as he loved no one else, and who had returned his affection in kind; but between himself and both father and mother there had always been a gulf of want of comprehension, in spite of strong mutual affection. His sister had died soon after leaving boarding school, just when she and John were confidently counting on each other's society at home—in enjoyment as uninterrupted as one could expect with a young girl in constant demand by companions of both sexes, and “coming out” in Society, with a capital S.

He was the elder by nearly four years, was completing his law-course in the University of Pennsylvania, which he had chosen that he might remain in the old Philadelphia home; and had promised Margaret that he would overcome his distaste for social “functions,” and docilely march his long legs into drawing-rooms and ballrooms in her company; “though no most exacting hostess with a bevy of ‘wall-flowers’ could expect a giraffe to dance.” The terpsichorean art would assuredly have suited him ill; and as he was not gifted with small talk, he became in that short time of “going out,” the much-appreciated companion of fathers and grand-fathers, with occasional practice on a mother or maiden aunt.

He was not in the least self-conscious or embittered by his want of social talent, and his sister's death soon swept everything else from his mind. After that he led a rather solitary life, and was rarely thrown with girls or women. With men he was al-

ways popular up to a certain point, though few were ever intimate with him, even at the cricket club where he spent most of his leisure time, and his brother lawyers found him a trifle uncomfortable in his standards, however unassuming in his claims. One had nicknamed him "Don Quixote," but all thoroughly respected his integrity and ability, and many would have been glad to be admitted with Dick Farnham, and the much younger George Raymond, behind the doors of his ingrained reserve.

The idea entered John's brooding mind that morning as he tethered one half his thoughts to the business in hand and let the other half roam at will, that if the little girl in question had been George's, his mother's attitude would have been a quite different one. She had always been heartily fond of George, and he was a constant and very enlivening visitor in the quiet house, while Dick had hardly once entered its doors for more than twenty years, and had had no chance to efface old impressions, even if it had been possible for him ever to have done so. In his case it is probable that absence was his best advocate. Mrs. Brown thought much more tolerantly of him when she did not see him, and the tragic circumstances of his adult life had measurably softened her old antipathy.

The crooked trembling lines of Dick's little letter had told John, more than the simple statement, that he felt the end was near; and the joy of this approaching meeting, after nearly seven years, was more than counterbalanced. But through all the pain and apprehension, John's heart would revert

with eager excitement to the child who was to be, in a manner, his property. He remembered her well as a remarkably pretty, intelligent, little girl of six or seven, who had aroused all the dormant child-hunger in his nature in the one all-too-short year that Dick had spent with his widowed mother in Germantown.

"She must be a big girl now, though," he thought with sudden damping of his ardor and a new apprehension. "If only she were a boy that he might bring home and keep!"

An alluring vision rose in John's mind of studies to be helped, games to be taught, excursions in the woods or on the river. (He always got on famously with boys of all ages.) "Oh, well, there was no use thinking of what might have been. He would do his best for a girl, and maybe she might grow to be like Margaret." But no girl that he saw—they were few enough he had to admit—ever did seem a bit like Margaret, and recent brushes with a highly sophisticated damsel or two had left him with a reluctant scepticism as to the growing generation.

CHAPTER II

A CHAPTER OF PAST HISTORY WHICH BEARS ON FUTURE EVENTS

IF Dick Farnham's face had not been the masculine counterpart of his gentle Quaker mother, he would have been unanimously voted a changeling in the placid, methodical family into which he happened to be born. He was the youngest of four children, and if example be better than precept, the cheerful decorum and unquestioning obedience of the other three should have sufficed to make him a model child. Perhaps there are times when example is too much "rubbed in," and the best rule is said to be proved by an occasional exception. He could hardly have been reproached for disobedience, though, for it never entered the heads of his unimaginative parents to forbid the things he took it into his own to do; and if he continually kicked over the traces, they were generally the traces of an unwritten code. He equaled them all in frankness, and surpassed them in the art of loving, which was no mean attainment; and while his mother punished him and prayed over him, redoubling the prayers when he grew too big to punish, her tender conscience accused her of flagrant partiality in the secretest corner of her heart.

But how could she help it! Everybody loved him

best, from the man who carted away the ashes of a Saturday morning to the sweet-faced teacher of the Primary class in the Germantown Friends' School, whom he was always posing by his questions, and winning by lover-like offerings of the prettiest pansies, or forget-me-nots, or pinks, presented with never-failing regret that they *would droop* in his little warm hand. The questions, which covered the whole scheme of the universe—with a special tendency to soar above this sublunary sphere—were never pert, and the teacher's Orthodox mind was occasionally troubled by a suspicion that they *were* pertinent.

As he grew older, he took to religious discussions as naturally as to love-making, and proved a winner in both departments. His mother and father, who were greatly disturbed by his latitudinarianism, exacted strict attendance at Meeting while he was under their jurisdiction; but they had the pain of seeing him break loose when left to himself, and the still greater pain of seeing him fall headlong into love with a beauty, who was not a Friend, and who was in no way fitted—or so they believed—to make him happy. She made him ecstatically happy for the space of the honeymoon, and then the disillusionment began. In the little western town where he was occupied in bridge-building, he underwent the severest discipline a nature like his could know; and barely two years from his wedding day, his wife eloped with a brother engineer, and left him alone (yet less alone than in her company) with a baby daughter who filled his world. All the thwarted, disappointed love of his heart centered on the child, whom no con-

sideration could have tempted him to give up. He declined the well-meant offer of his wife's sister, Mrs. Gill, with a finality that broke off even the strained relations existing between them before; nor could he be prevailed upon to go back to German-town and live with his parents, whom the years had left childless. His mother knew him too well to suggest his resigning the baby to her while he lived in the West; but her yearning anxiety had now an additional object.

Dick had given up his work entirely the day after his wife's desertion, and, with the warm promise from his chief of a good post when he should be ready to take it, had devoted all his time to his one treasure. He had the good fortune to find a Protestant Irish woman, old enough to have judgment, and young enough to like the care of an active child already beginning to run about; and her qualities of head and heart so won his confidence that he was soon able to go back to his work, leaving little Mary in her charge. Catharine had great love for children, and infinite patience and tact; and she contrived so many ways of letting off steam, that the miniature high-power engine in her charge seldom ran off the very broad-gauge track allowed her. As the child had a quick temper as well as a strong will, it is not surprising that her grandmother was concerned for the future, since it was soon evident that Dick's régime contained no penal code, and included no *ex post facto* sentences. He was not entirely weak where the child was concerned, nor was he too self-indulgent to have punished her small misdemeanors

if he had felt it a duty to her character; he simply disbelieved in the efficacy of punishment. "Being spanked or put to bed in the daytime never made me any better," he told himself; "and she is hardly ever naughty." Perhaps some correct people would entirely have disagreed with him on both points, and he soon recognized that Mary was as like him in character as it was possible for a little girl to be. His conscience had uneasy moments after each letter from his mother, who thought he should make up his mind to come East at any professional sacrifice, and that "the child should not be left so much to the care of an ignorant woman, however faithful." She had been horrified once to hear that Mary had badly bitten little Jack Wurts, her constant playmate, and that, only because he *would* kiss her, and Dick refrained from mentioning the tantrums that had surprised and discouraged himself when Catharine had been off duty for a couple of weeks in a neighboring hospital.

It was not long after this that his accusing conscience had been stilled by an event which solved the problem for the time being. His father had died suddenly, and his mother, after the necessary adjustment of her affairs, had returned with Dick and Mary to the little Black Run cottage where Dick was filling a contract of his own. Even amid the stress of social and business claims, Mrs. Farnham's mind had found time to dwell anxiously upon her granddaughter, who "wound them all round her finger." She felt obliged to remonstrate when the child drenched herself with soap and water over her doll's

wash, or returned like a little sweep from the business of blacking the kitchen stove; but Catharine told her with modest deference, that her father never minded if it were only her clothes that suffered. "She hardly ever gets cold," she said propitiatingly, "and she has too much sense to touch the hot parts of the stove when I tell her where they are."

One acute cause of concern Mrs. Farnham kept to herself till a fitting opportunity should come to broach the subject with Dick. His loving admiring eyes resting upon her as they sat together in the ugly little cottage-parlor the evening after their return to the West might have quieted any fear of giving offence; but her voice was not quite steady as she said hesitatingly: "Dick, I have been wanting to speak to thee about Mary's religious instruction. What is thee teaching her? Surely thee would not impart thy doubts, if thee still has them, to her little mind?"

(Dick always undressed the child and put her to bed himself, and seeing Catharine tactfully withdraw, after leaving everything ready to his hand, Mrs. Farnham had taken the unintended hint, and refrained from intrusion on those bed-time rites.)

His face quivered at her searching question. It was long since he and his mother had spoken on this delicate subject, but he answered with gentle readiness: "Mother, I think faith is the greatest thing in the world, for you can't have *real love* without it, but I should like to give Mary a faith too broad to be easily overturned. I don't want her to depend on broken reeds. My own worst trouble was not

losing my wife; it was losing faith in her." His voice broke. Mrs. Farnham found no fitting response.

"But it never shook my faith in human nature," he finally went on; "I saw she hadn't tried to deceive me; I had only insisted on giving her a character that didn't belong to her, and making an idol of it. I'm afraid I'll hurt thee if I say that is what people seem to me to be doing with the Bible in idealizing it—in teaching children that it is infallible. Many men I know are losing hold on it altogether, and letting it go out of their lives just because they were required to believe something of it as children that they find untenable now. Don't think I under-value it," he interrupted himself, "I shouldn't have made that comparison, perhaps. I have read it a good deal these lonely evenings, and I wouldn't be without it for anything; but I could never look on it as all of equal weight and inspiration."

"Ah, my dear boy," Mrs. Farnham replied sadly, "if the young people of to-day would trust more to the guidance and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in reading the Scriptures, and would cultivate that pure humility that seems to be so much less common than it used to be, I think they would get closer to the truth. I know thee has a great love of truth, but it pains me unspeakably to feel that thee has been led to doubt the doctrines of Friends regarding the Atonement, or the Divinity of Our Lord."

Dick said nothing. His chin rested on his interlaced fingers; his eyes were on the ground.

"The day before we left home," Mrs. Farnham went on, "Mary was with me in my room when I

said my morning prayer, so I prayed aloud in words that she could understand. She was quiet for some time after we rose from our knees, and I saw her looking out of the window as though she were thinking deeply about something. Finally she turned to me and said with the wise look she has: "Grandma, Father never says 'for Jesus' sake' before 'Amen.' (Mrs. Farnham never tried to repeat Mary's sayings in the vernacular; it would have seemed to her an approach to play-acting.)

Dick's bright, expectant eyes had been raised to hers as soon as she commenced to speak of the child, and at the quotation of her words, a smile, partly amused and surprised, altogether tender, overspread his face.

"Mother," he said, replying to the gentle impeachment of her grave eyes, "I have told Mary that her Heavenly Father loves her even more than I do, and is even more anxious to give her everything that is right. How could I make her understand why she should ask anything 'for Jesus' sake'?"

Mrs. Farnham's eyes filled. She hesitated a moment; then she said gravely: "But is it not God's *love* that *'gave'* us His 'only begotten Son' to be a mediator? I accept no mediation of man, and we are all told to believe in the 'Indwelling Christ,' who can 'guide us into all truth'; but the dear Lord himself enjoined upon us to ask in His name, and said 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me.'"

"Ah, but how?" was the quick rejoinder. "It is so hard to say just what I want, but I know thee doesn't hold the theory of the Atonement that some

of our good old Friends preached till I felt I couldn't sit still another minute. I know I oughtn't to have stayed away for that reason; but they stirred up every combative feeling in me whenever I went. They say things are different now, but I haven't been in a Meeting since the old Haverford days until these last weeks, and it seemed pretty much the same old story. I feel more charitable now, and I know they often mean 'life' when they say 'blood.' Forgive me, Mother; I want to be quite reverent; but it seems to me a pity to use a term that reminds us all the time of the original idea of an animal offering to appease an angry God. I suppose thee sides with those who believe that God's love was *obliged* to sacrifice Jesus to His sense of justice? That makes it possible to believe in a loving Heavenly Father; but it is very subtle and hard to understand.

"I am no theologian," he went on, after waiting in vain for her answer; "but I have thought a great deal about these things, and I have really prayed hard to know how to teach Mary the right thing. I don't deny Jesus' divinity; but I believe that we are *all* 'sons of God,'—that is, that all the spiritual part of us is like a fire kindled at the great central Divine Fire, and is of the same 'substance,' or 'essence,' or whatever you choose to call it. The difference of our divinity from Christ's can only be a difference in degree. 'In Him dwelt *all* the fullness of the Godhead bodily.' Surely there cannot be two kinds of divinity. It is theoretically possible for each one of us to be 'perfect even as our Father in Heaven is perfect.' We are commanded to be so."

"But thee is leaving out the supernatural elements in Jesus' life."

"Mother, I have told thee that I am very ignorant of what learned people think on these subjects, but I don't understand them myself. Most of the little theology I have read was 'Greek' to me. The reasoning is too subtle. The Bible, and the copy of Whittier's poems thee gave me when I went to college, have been my stand-bys. I am sure most of my ideas must have been held by thousands of other people, for they seem just what would come naturally to any unbiased mind trying to reason things out. If I ever have time I'm going to study up a little on 'criticism.'

"But thee hasn't answered my question, dear. What value does thee put upon the accounts of the Nativity in Matthew and Luke?"

"That's just what I'm not prepared to say," he returned with a quick smile, acknowledging that she scored a point. "I teach Mary the beautiful Christmas gospels as anyone *would* teach them to a child. What does it matter if truth and legend have got a little mixed up! But later I shall teach her what I think is the truth in regard to the 'Immaculate Birth.' I cannot believe in it as thee does. I don't deny that it may be *possible*, but it ought not to be *necessary* to Christ's divinity. That seems to me to belittle ordinary motherhood, and I can't believe God ever breaks His own laws."

"But does thee think we fully understand what His laws are?"

"No, I am sure we don't. We are beginning to

understand some things that used to be called supernatural. I really don't believe there is any such thing as 'supernatural.'"

He sighed deeply as he saw his mother's half-puzzled, half-pained expression. Suddenly he rose and kissed her.

"I have never spoken to anyone about all this before, but I want us to understand each other, and I want thee to see that I shall try to teach Mary not to love Christ less, only differently. If I were to die I would leave her to thy teaching with perfect confidence; but while I live I can never give up this part of her education, and I couldn't possibly teach her anything I didn't believe myself. I will try to make her teaching as evangelical as I conscientiously can. Will that satisfy thee?" He kissed her again in the old-time boyish way that had always made it so hard to resist him.

"My precious child, I can only ask that the Holy Spirit may 'guide thee into all truth.' I cannot think thy reasoning right, but I know thy heart is right, and we all have much need of guidance."

CHAPTER III

A SACRED TRUST

THAT had been a happy time for Dick; and his mother, in spite of her recent sorrow and the great change in her life, found a deep joy in the companionship of this son, of whom she had seen so little since his boyhood, and she learned to love Mary as only grandmothers can.

In the spring Dick completed his work, and they went back to Germantown for that year in which John's acquaintance with his future ward began and ended. The following spring Mrs. Farnham followed her husband to that other world which had been so much with her in this, and the happy household was broken up.

Some months previously an event had occurred which was to mean much to little Mary and to big John Brown. Dick had had a fall from a bridge pier, which caused great anxiety to his mother and John; but after two or three days of lameness, he seemed entirely recovered, and the doctor could find no permanent injury. It was not till after his mother's death that he began to suffer from headache and lassitude, both unprecedented with him. They were attributed, partly at least, to nervous strain and all the consequences of his bereavement; for

the loss of his mother was a heavy blow,—the more so that little Mary missed her grandmother sorely.

The doctor recommended a sea voyage, and Dick had gone abroad, with the child and Catharine. He meant to spend the summer in easy traveling to the great engineering wonders of Germany and Switzerland, combining pleasure with physical and mental profit. Mary was old enough to be interested in many things, and her father was an inexhaustible mine of amusement. It was a summer of delight, in spite of stubborn recurrences of the headache, which turned, in the autumn, to backache, and induced Dick to plan a speedy return home. But just as they were setting out from the little town of Spiess on Lake Thun, he was stricken with entire paralysis of the lower limbs, which made a journey of any considerable length impossible.

It was long before he would give up hope. His rebellious spirit fought against the fearful fate that confronted him of a life of helpless invalidism and suffering; but as the hope grew less, week by week, and month by month, he gained strength to conquer despair, to overcome pain and weakness, and be almost his old bright self for the sake of the child. He *must* make his couch an attractive place for her, or his life would be desolate indeed! How well he succeeded was evident to all who saw them together; what it cost him only God knew—God, and, as he often told himself, John Brown.

Yet in all his years of exile he had seen John only once. He had never left Switzerland, and it was in a villa that he rented for many years on Lake Geneva,

near the town of Lausanne, that the happy meeting took place. John had induced his mother to spend a summer abroad, and had stolen a month of it for a visit to his friend. He had not seen Mary, for the night before his arrival she had developed scarlet-fever, and was strictly quarantined on the top floor, with Catharine and her father's capable nurse in attendance. John did not dare to see her for fear of carrying the contagion to Dick, who was forbidden the slightest risk, and whom only the companionship and influence of his friend kept from open rebellion. He had said that any attendant would do for him; but John set aside all suggestions of strange nursing and gave his time to the invalid day and night. The fever proved light, and reassuring messages constantly reached them from above; so the visit had been an almost unclouded joy even to Dick. John delayed his parting till the little patient was declared nearly out of quarantine, and his mother's endurance—her patience had gone long before—was practically exhausted. He knew his going would mean desolation to poor Dick, but he counted on the child's return to heal the ache.

When the nurse had half-jokingly said, on renewing her duties, that "she was afraid she was but a poor substitute for Mr. Brown," Dick had turned his face to the wall, and even his never-failing courtesy had proved unequal to the occasion.

It was with these and other memories of the past, that John's mind was filled as he made the short journey from the city.

He and Dick had been good correspondents—for

men—but, latterly, the letters had grown shorter, and, on Dick's part, less frequent. How full they used to be of the life in Switzerland, and how brave and uncomplaining! John knew the details of the school episode which had so aroused his mother's indignation (it had occurred just before his visit to Lausanne), and, though he could not find it in his heart to blame Dick, he had felt hopeless of bringing Mrs. Brown to his way of looking at the matter, and had made no attempt to tell her about it.

He knew how Dick had made the sacrifice, and was resting in the peace—and loneliness—of duty done, when the passionate, headstrong child had rushed back from school, and told him she *would not* stay; and then had cut short his attempts at sternness and reasoning by kissing him over and over again and crying on his pillow and begging him to let her stay with him and be taught there.

He had known it wrong to keep her from the companionship of other children, but he had not had strength of purpose equal to hers, and she had won the day. He had taught her much, himself, and had studied languages with her from native teachers, both gaining an excellent knowledge of French and German. In history, and study of the Bible, she covered ground rarely gained by school girls, and Dick talked to her of her own nature, and the meaning of life, as a wise mother might have spoken; and taught her, by means of the world's great love-stories and poems, to feed her budding emotions on what was noblest and purest in the history of passion.

If he checked her impulses very little and almost

ignored conventions, he trained her soul, and watched it find its wings. He tried to make it as beautiful as her body, and only prayed, in Heine's exquisite words, that God would keep her

So rein, und schön, und hold.

It was one of those perfect days when the freshness of spring was beginning to merge in the luxuriance of summer; when the last lilacs still lingered and the earliest rose-buds were showing color. Soft sprays of bridal-wreath and mock-orange scented the air from the many well-kept little lawns and dooryards, as John trod the familiar streets toward the old Farnham house.

It had been occupied for years by an elderly cousin in reduced circumstances, who used only a part but kept the whole in spotless order, in return for a rent-free lodging. She had modestly insisted on retiring when the news of Dick's home-coming reached her, and had only waited to see that all was in readiness for the pathetic little party, urging a long-desired visit to a relative as a reason for leaving next day. As John entered the old, well-remembered hall, and mounted the stairs to Mrs. Farnham's room, in which he was told he would find the invalid, the past was so crowding his mind that it seemed as if Dick's lithe, active figure would come swinging down to meet him half way.

So strong was the illusion, that the white form of the nurse, passing him with the injunction to "go in at once," was like a cold hand at his heart. The cheery greeting, which he was preparing, died on his lips, and

the sight of the changed, emaciated face turned towards him from the old four-poster, the eager, welcoming eyes so unnaturally large, and the eager "Oh, John!" such a ghost of his old voice, made the hand clutch more fiercely and the constriction in his throat forbid one word of answering greeting. He could only hold the thin hand in his strong one, trying in vain to keep back the burning tears. He was ashamed of his want of self-control and afraid of its effect on Dick, but the quiet voice reassured him: "Don't fret, old man, it's all right—now that you are here."

John met the clear eyes, which seemed already to reflect the peace of another world. "I am so sorry to behave like this," he said huskily; "but it has been seven years, Dick, and—"

"I know," the other interrupted him, "and I am more changed than you expected." His face did not cloud.

John made no attempt to utter one of those affectionate fibs with which the recording angel has filled so many pages. They had always understood each other.

"Dick, why did you not let me know? You should have sent for me to come home with you. Why, I had my passage taken to go out to you next week, for all summer."

A quick flush rose in Dick's face. "Really! Ah, if I had only known! I did write you, but Mary found the letter yesterday in the pocket of her winter coat. The poor child was terribly cut up about it, she so rarely forgets anything that concerns me. Oh, I have so much to talk to you about, and it is better

that I am here, only we might have had more time together over there. The voyage has taken a good deal out of me." The long speech was taxing him severely now.

"Hand me the little glass there, will you, John? Miss Patton left it in case of need, and I think I will forestall the need." John rose and held it to his lips. He feared that the need was scarcely forestalled.

They were silent for some time; then Dick said, "John, will you sit here," indicating the space beside him, "and put your arm around me as you used to do when you were a boy?"

John complied with a swelling heart, and at Dick's request to lift him up a little, raised the thin shoulders in the hollow of his encircling arm as easily as he might have lifted a baby.

"What a touch you have, John! You are a natural nurse. I never seemed to get over missing you after you left me in Lausanne. But I must not let you hold me so for long. There is a limit even to your strength."

"You will never reach its limit in this way. I could hold you so all day. But don't try to talk. I know what is uppermost in your mind, and we need no vows between us. You know that *so long as I live*"—he gave each word a solemn emphasis—"Mary shall be to me all that my little girl would be to you if our cases were reversed."

Dick answered him only by a look.

"I wish she were a boy," John resumed, with his little quizzical smile to lighten the solemnity of the promise he was making. "I feel so inexperienced with

girls, and she is getting older all the time. She must be over twelve?"

"She will be sixteen next week," Dick said, smiling brightly at the consternation his statement brought to his friend's face. "But, John, dear old fellow, she is the veriest child! Oh, I would like to talk to you about her for hours, but I must condense. I feel so comfortable, and so happy, it seems as though my strength were coming back!"

"You have been over-tired," John answered quickly. "Surely you will rally in a day or two." It seemed to him that Dick's face had already altered for the better.

"Do you know, John,"—how he loved to repeat the name—"there is some power in you that I can't describe. It is like health itself. It will be a great thing to be strong and well again, as I have faith I shall; but—many men would be willing to bear more than I have for the sake of the companionship they love best. I know I have been selfish, but I cannot make her leave me for long. She went out for some fruit for me just before you came, and I begged her to take a long walk in this delicious air; but—all I can ever do is beg." He paused a moment out of breath. "Miss Newlin has promised to take charge of her education, and give her a permanent home"—John saw the pain the thought caused him—"but all authority over her person and property is to be left unreservedly to you. Catharine is living at Fernwood, you know, and Mary would be happiest with her till school time comes. It is close to the city, so you could look in on her sometimes."—His voice broke utterly, and the first tears

he had shed brimmed over and stole down his hollow cheeks.

John's answer was mute at first; then he said huskily: "I was to have had three uninterrupted months with you in Switzerland. Please God I shall have them here; but,"—he choked a little at the difficult words—"if it is not to be with you it shall be with Mary."

"Oh, John, what can I ever say, except that it is like you! It makes my going such a different thing. You say you don't understand girls, but you will understand her."

"I suspect she won't stay many years in my care if she is sixteen; but" (seeing a shadow pass over the invalid's face) "married or single it will be all the same to me. *As long as I live*," he emphasized the words again, "I shall always be right on hand if she wants me."

Words were impossible to Dick for some minutes; then he asked John to lay him down again. "She must be here soon, now," he said. "I will shut my eyes and try to rest a little first. Sit there by the window. You don't know what it is to feel you near!"

There was complete silence in the room for a while; a pioneer fly buzzed in and out of the open window, and the fresh spring breeze stirred the muslin curtains. John's eyes roved around the simple, old-fashioned room that he remembered so well, and rested on the peaceful face on the bed. He felt the comfort he had given, and rejoiced; but he was surprised at his own excitement, and at the bound his heart gave when a young girl turned in at the gate and came quickly up

the path, carrying a bunch of mock-orange in her hand. A broad hat hid her face from his height.

Dick heard the opening of the hall door and the nurse's voice speaking below. His eyes were wide and bright in a moment. There was a quick step on the stair and the object of so much solicitude and apprehension entered like an embodiment of the May day outside. Childlike, curious eyes met John's from what seemed to him the loveliest face his own had ever looked upon. She checked her hurried pace, and on a question from the bed as to whether she did not "remember John Brown," came to him at once, transferring her flowers to her left hand, and holding her right to him with the ease of a finished hostess or the unconsciousness of a little child. Nothing here of the missishness of sixteen that he always dreaded. She smiled as he took her hand and held it a moment in his strong clasp, but said nothing, and turned at once to her father.

"Miss Carter sent you these, Father. Why, you look better already!" Dick smiled up in her scrutinizing face, and took possession of both hand and flowers without paying any attention to the latter.

"I want to speak to you, Mary, of something that is very important to you. My dearest, John Brown (he did not say 'Mr. Brown') has promised that—when I—can be with you no longer—he will take care of you. It makes me very happy, and you—you loved him when you were a little girl. I know you will grow to love him again—as much as I do."

When he began to speak Mary turned full around, and her grave, unwavering gaze never left John's face. His eyes met hers without flinching. Each was too deeply in earnest for self-consciousness. At her father's last word her lips softened and trembled. She went straight to where John stood motionless, and lifted her face to his with complete simplicity; and as he bent his tall head to meet her, she pressed her fresh lips frankly and warmly to his thin cheek.

"I love you now," she said.

The color mounted in a crimson flood to the roots of John's hair, but there was no awkwardness nor embarrassment in the quick gesture with which he drew her to his side, and answered as simply:

"And I love *you* now."

In his early manhood John had learned to treat the sea of his emotions and passions in hardy Dutch fashion, and had—half unconsciously—built up a formidable dyke of strong moral and religious purpose, altruism, and intellectuality, which had thus far protected his quiet, active life most effectually from devastating inroads. When some unforeseen wind of sentiment or passion made a moderate roaring outside he patiently strengthened his ramparts, but usually he thought little about them and was happy. With the warm pressure of two innocent lips a sudden tidal-wave swept clear over his barriers, and he had not even time to consider whether it might mean future desolation to his peaceful preserve. He only knew that life seemed suddenly full of vital, personal interest.

As he went home to dinner he pictured the ordered

perfection of the scene that awaited him, and recalled the comfortable monotony of the long years of decorous homeliness that stretched away into the past. How silver gray it all looked since this rising sun had begun to throw its rosy darts across his horizon.

Even the newly-made promise to Dick—made with a straight facing of all it might entail—seemed, like the courageous bounty of St. Elizabeth, to have turned to roses in his hands; and how should he remember that roses have thorns!

CHAPTER IV

AN INHERITED FRIENDSHIP

“**A**NOTHER telegram.” With this laconic announcement the elderly, one-armed clerk laid a little yellow envelope on John’s desk, and went out. Its kind were no strangers in this quiet office on Fourth Street where John carried on an altruistic law practice. It was a large if not profitable practice (giving the word profitable its usually accepted meaning), for when, at sixteen, his father died leaving him a hundred thousand of his own, and the prospect of his mother’s two-third share and the house, some day, he had decided to use his faculties (after he had sufficiently trained them) to help the “under dog” in the fight. His fortune was not large enough to suggest one kind of philanthropy, and he never thought of himself as a philanthropist; but in spite of an innate dislike for red tape and musty precedent, he determined to study law, and to make it synonymous with justice so far as he was concerned, using his quick grasp of a situation, and marvelously retentive memory in the service of those whose wrongs needed righting, but who had not money to pay for the best quality of justice. He could at least give them the best quality of *inten-*

tion, for even as a boy, a "square deal" had been a passion with him.

This was the third message that morning, and the clock hands pointed only to 10.15. John drew a slim letter-opener toward him, and, cutting it without haste, quietly spread it out. The sight of the few words made him start violently with a pain he gave himself no time to entertain. He gave a glance toward the clock, another at the upper one of a neat pile of time-tables conveniently pigeon-holed, and folded back in a special manner; then he made one step to his hat, and in another moment was passing through his outer office.

"I'll not be in again to-day. Please send word to my mother that she need not expect me home for lunch." The last words were uttered half-way down the passage. "I shall make it if I have luck!" he added to himself as he reached the street; and the combination of luck and long legs enabled him to "make it."

Only three days had elapsed since the visit recorded in the last chapter. The following afternoon had been spent again with the invalid, who had seemed decidedly stronger, and able to enter upon questions of vital importance to them both. Mary had been in the room when John got there, but had gone away almost immediately, and he had not had another glimpse of her. His parting words to Dick had been of regret that the next day must be given to his mother's business; "but I will be down as early as I can on Saturday, and next week—." The words had been full of expectation, now never to be fulfilled.

The kindly old lady on the opposite seat wondered what great trouble was bowing the shoulders and lining the rigid face of the big man who looked so like Lincoln.

In less than half an hour he was striding up the path he had watched so anxiously three days before, for the first glimpse of the child who was to be his one of these days. Who could have foreseen that the day would come so soon! How could he bear to look on that bright face with the great change upon it!

Miss Patton, the nurse, saw him coming, and opened the door before he rang. Her kindly face showed traces of distress. "It was quite sudden, and very peaceful," she said in an intentionally lowered voice, pointing to the door of the room at the head of the stairs, next Dick's. "She was with him when the end came and I couldn't make her leave him till I had to fairly drive her out. She is much too quiet; she hasn't cried at all, and she wrote the telegram to you herself. But she will hear me!"—she interrupted herself in a still lower voice.

John mounted the stairway softly, his mind full of his last visit; but all sense of his own irreparable loss was wiped out by the sight of the pathetic figure that had risen from the sofa-cushions at the sound of his step, and met him just within the open door. An expression of relief that was almost joy welcomed him, and, with one mutual impulse, she was in his arms, her face buried on his breast, and he held her in a close embrace more eloquent than words of that tenderness and protection to be exerted for her henceforth.

"I didn't think you could get here so soon!" she said brokenly. Her breath came in short sobs which she made a brave effort to control.

The sudden, unexpected, loosening of the tension of waiting, loosened with it her unnatural self-control. John's own breath came pantingly.

"No, no, dear child, cry it out!" he said huskily, as he bent and softly kissed the parting of the disheveled brown hair. His words and caress opened the flood-gates, and Miss Patton moved away from the foot of the stairs, where she had almost involuntarily waited, and went with a satisfied smile and wet eyes to unburden herself to Susan in the kitchen, though that honest maid-of-all-work was but a new acquaintance.

How long John held the sobbing child he had no idea. His dyke was down now to the last stone, but he did not know it; nor did he think of another dyke whose necessity he would soon begin to foresee and whose maintenance was to be at the cost of years of "eternal vigilance." Long after the painful sobs had ceased, little by little, and the swollen, tear-stained face was lying quietly just over his quick-beating heart, he still held her close in the pregnant silence which had thus far been the main factor in their extraordinary friendship. Then she drew him into the next room, and together they stood beside the still form on the bed.

How young he looked, and how noble the lines of lip and brow! The ravages of disease, the very emaciation that had so shocked John a few days ago, were smoothed away by that transforming finger

of death. Even the slight paraphernalia of the grim visitant could not detract from the majesty of the picture.

Mary loosed her hand from his clasp, and fell on her knees beside the bed. She did not cry now, but the droop of the whole figure, the abandonment to a crushing weight beyond her power of realization, seemed to John's mind less like a desolate child than a young mother whose one treasure has been snatched from her. He recalled Dick's words regarding the weight of responsibility this child-woman had been carrying. He remembered that telegram—indeed it had never been absent from his consciousness for a moment on the short journey: "Father has gone. Can you come?" All his great body yearned to shoulder her burdens, to insert his strength between her and all that was still to come; to make the rest of her girlhood care-free and happy. Yet what availed his strength or purpose in the face of a separation such as this—the rending of such a tie as this!

The tears were running down his face, but he made no attempt to comfort her now. He felt that she was far from him, on the path that each must tread alone. Gradually a strong sense of Dick's spiritual presence beside him recalled him to his new responsibility, and the keeping of his promise. He hesitated a moment, but the sound of wheels that stopped outside made him hesitate no longer. Without a word he stooped and lifted Mary to her feet and held her as before. She showed no surprise, and made no protest. Her strong spirit was acknowledging a stronger one; and if he had but known it, the display

of unusual physical force went home to her heart as perhaps nothing else could have at the moment.

John told himself—not in words, for he rarely thought in words—that he had lived more in the past four days than in all the four and thirty years of his previous existence. Not since he had looked on Margaret lying thus, cold and quiet, had his heart been so wrung with pain; and never, he knew, at any time, had he known the sweetness of this— His eyes came back from the face on the pillow to the face half-buried against his arm. “Mary,” he said very low, “no one can ever take anything of his place with you, but I should like to fill as big a place of my own as you will let me.” She tried to speak, but no words came, and he went on: “All that you tell me will be safe with me, and you can never ask me anything that I shall not want to do.”

For all answer she lifted his hand and pressed her cheek to the palm. No words could have told more clearly of gratitude, and trust, and awakened affection. What feelings the little gesture, so well-known to her father, awakened now the rugged face bent over her did not show. At least they were not too strong to prevent John’s quick ear from detecting voices on the stair. Still holding her close, he opened wide the door to the hall and drew her into the adjoining room. As the door closed behind them he seated her beside him on the enormous old sofa which he had always loved as a boy; then he took one cold hand in his warm one, and said with the assurance of acknowledged authority, or long intimacy: “Now tell me.” And she did. The sad little recital was given

in few and simple words, her tear-stained face lifted to his; but his part was to come. There was business that he must speak of; arrangements that he could not make without consulting her. She wanted to leave everything to him. "He knew so well what her father liked, and still more what he disliked." But there was another matter that John found it harder to enter upon.

"I must go up to town this afternoon to attend to things," he said, "but not for long. I will be here for the night. This sofa is a good old friend and just my size. But—there are some things that I am afraid to undertake for you, and it is Saturday. I will send a telegram at once for Catharine, and when she comes you could send Miss Patton in to do any shopping for you,—or, I will try—to do my best." He spoke almost shyly.

Mary clasped her free fingers around those that held her other hand. It was all the expression her gratitude found; but after a short pause she said very low: "Mr. Brown, do you think I ought to wear mourning for Father? I would so much rather not."

Surprise took away, for the moment, all John's power of speech. The child who had just cried her heart out in his arms was transformed to a dignified woman with views of her own, and those, exceptional ones. Before he found his voice she went on quickly: "Father didn't approve of it,—and I *mustn't* mourn for him. He is well now, and happy; only I can't think of his being *quite* happy anywhere—without me."

Her face was indistinct to John. He turned away his own. The muscles of his chest and throat ached fiercely. Then he braced himself for his first paternal homily.

"My dear Mary," he said, "I think your father was quite right, and I should be the last to ask you to disregard his wishes,—but, there are some things that are accepted customs, and—where no principle is involved—I think a young girl is happier—" The wondering eyes (were they gray, or green, or hazel?) fixed so intently on his, made John stumble hopelessly, and lose the thread of his discourse.

"But it seems to me there *is* a principle," she ventured hesitatingly.

"And I would be true to it," he said quickly, undoing his previous advice in a flash. "Your father's daughter ought to have courage to stand by her principles—but you will find life harder."

He put his arm impulsively round her as though he would shield her from unsympathetic comment. His thoughts flew to his mother. He knew how she would regard this "freak," and he began to see breakers ahead. He had come to that parting of the ways where a man must take sides, and what were his mother's chances against that head, full, no doubt, of Dick's eccentric ideas, which seemed to find its blue serge pillow so comfort-giving a resting place? Another long silence. They were making rapid strides along the road to mutual understanding. Miss Patton's call to lunch startled them to their feet.

What a man this was! The nurse felt that a weight

had been lifted from her shoulders, and things were not so tragic after all. She hardly marveled at Mary's attitude to him now, though she knew how short their acquaintance was, and she had always found Mary little inclined to defer to anyone unless it were her father.

"Mr. Farnham knew what he was about," she said to Susan, as she helped with the dishes after the simple lunch was finished—it could hardly be said to have been eaten. "Any girl might be happy to be left in charge of a man like that!"

Susan grunted something that seemed to be meant for assent. "I suppose he'll take her to live with him as soon as things get straightened out here?"

"Oh, no, I made free to ask that, and she said his mother mightn't want her, and she is to go to a friend who keeps a school. She's going now to her old nurse who lives in the country, somewhere out of Philadelphia. She was with them from the time Miss Mary was a baby, and wouldn't have married the man she was engaged to if Miss Mary hadn't found it out and told her father. He made her go. Miss Mary was about eleven; too old for a nurse anyhow; but she told me she'd often cried for her when her father didn't know. I guess he did though, for there wasn't much he missed where she was concerned. He was the patientest man I ever nursed." (She wiped her eyes, unaffectedly.) "The nurse didn't have long to enjoy her married life either, for her husband died a year ago, I believe."

"Mr. Farnham's wife died when Miss Mary was a baby, didn't she?"

"Law, no, she ran away and left him. I only found it out accidentally, and I don't believe he ever told *her*," with a motion of her head toward the upper regions. "She died a year or two after, in childbirth I did hear say, and she had some relations, but of course Mr. Farnham wouldn't want Miss Mary to know them."

"Good land! Well, dyin' served her right! What kind of a woman could she have been to leave such a nice husband and such a pretty baby; for she's about the best lookin' girl ever I saw. I expect the mother was one o' them handsome hussies that turn so many men's heads," and Susan looked volumes on the infatuation of men and the frailties of women.

Meantime the object of their discussion was sitting idly with her head against the frame of the window, and her eyes fixed on space. The clock striking four roused her from her reverie, and she started up. "I will go down to the parlor window where I can see him when he comes," she thought, and John's heart gave a bound when, a half-hour later, his eyes encountered the waiting figure framed in the ivy-grown embrasure of the window. Almost on his heels came Catharine, and it gave him unspeakable relief to see the motherly arms about her beloved "child," and hear the familiar, tender questioning, the simple expressions of grief natural to the true woman.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF THE TRUST

THREE days later, the last sad rites performed, they left the old house, so full of sweet and melancholy memories, and John escorted Catharine and Mary to the little cottage at Fernwood.

Mary had been very quiet, and even cheerful, on the short journey, and showed an interest in looking over the neat premises, with a trim garden behind the house, and scrap of lawn about it; in examining the rooms, filled with many souvenirs of bygone days; and in arranging some of her possessions in the spotless little chamber which was to be hers. But when John rose to go, with an assurance of his return next day, she suddenly clung to him in such a passion of tears that he could not make up his mind to leave her. It was only on a hint from Catharine, who was too sweet-natured to be hurt by this display of feeling for another, that Mary finally told him to go, and even tried to reassure him by a smile.

Dinner was over when he reached home, and his mother received him with a rather aggrieved expression, without, however, uttering any word of reproach even when she found that he must have finished his escort of his new ward hours before. She had made some excuse for not going to the funeral that morn-

ing, as she had found good reasons for not "intruding upon Mary's grief" before; and John felt a secret relief that for the time being, they were not to be brought together. He was not given to self-analysis, and perhaps if he had been, he would not have understood why he dreaded his mother's eye upon Mary just yet. He was hardly conscious of the feeling itself, but was thankful to Mrs. Brown for asking only perfunctory questions. Her positive dislike for Dick had been something entirely incomprehensible to John, and he was instinctively on the defensive now with regard to Mary. What would his mother think of the attitude in which he already stood to the child? To him it seemed so natural that she should turn to him as the man whom her father had most loved and trusted, and to whom he had entrusted her, and that the same free-masonry of spiritual kinship which had knit him so closely to Dick in his boyhood, should develop at once between himself and this girlish epitome of Dick. In the forcing-house of intimate intercourse of these few days, every opinion she expressed—or left unexpressed—every unstudied show of emotion, had laid her heart before him like an open book, in which each page he turned deepened the interest and delight of the study. He knew that he was only in the very early chapters; what those closed pages would contain, no one could prophesy; but nothing false or mean, that he would vouch for, to all the world!

And yet, he knew that this loving, jealously tender mother of his, so kindly, cordially open toward those whom she understood, and liked, could close her nature like a vise against those who were anti-

pathetic to her; and an unerring instinct told him that the first sight of Mary would have closed it, even if the conviction of an imposition put upon her beloved "boy" had not already set the seal of her disapproval on all that concerned his charge. John knew, too, that she was hoping for his company to Northeast Harbor, now that his immediate duties here were over; knew it as well as though she had spoken in the plainest language; and that she would confidently expect him to spend a considerable part of his vacation with her, now that his trip to Switzerland had been given up. He also knew that he would not have thought of doing so, even if it had been his dearest wish. Had it not all been arranged long ago, even to her journey up in the company of intimate friends? Perhaps he ought to go as far as Boston with her, and see her on the Bar Harbor train? He had certainly meant to do that before he sailed, but now, the time necessary for the journey seemed ages long!

His mother's train left Boston at 8.00 A. M. There was no way of shortening his time of absence by traveling at night. The pain and sweetness of that last hour in the little parlor at Fernwood were still quivering through his whole frame. He felt his firmness and resolve slipping from him. "Of course I shall go to Boston with you, Mother," he said with almost startling suddenness; he felt that he must commit himself at once, and shut off all avenues for back-sliding. "I wish you might go all the way, and spend a few days," Mrs. Brown found courage to say. "Now that the child is settled with her nurse, you need have no concern about her for a while, and I suppose

you won't have to attend to any business connected with your executorship for a few days?"

"Why, Mother, of course there will be a great many things to attend to at once, and for some time to come," he exclaimed almost indignantly. Then, his native honesty forcing the words from him, "And I should not like to go so far away from Mary this summer."

"This summer! Do you mean to say that you are to give up your whole vacation and spend the summer in the city looking after a child who—" she checked herself. "If Miss Newlin is going to take her, why doesn't she go to her at once? It would be a much more fitting arrangement than leaving her with a servant, I don't care how faithful she may be." Mrs. Brown's "she's" almost tripped up her meaning.

"She has not seen much of Miss Newlin yet," John answered gently, "and she needs familiar faces about her now, and the mothering Catharine can give her. She is to go to Miss Newlin a week before school opens, and, meantime, they will meet occasionally and get better acquainted." There was a suspicious tremor in his voice, in spite of his effort to make it matter-of-fact.

"Well *your* face wasn't familiar to her a few days ago; but, by this time, it must be. Who got her clothes for her?"

"If you mean her mourning, she is not going to wear any," he said, with some trepidation.

"I suppose that was her father's request," Mrs. Brown said with ominous gentleness, as who should

say, "You cannot surprise me with anything from that source."

"No," John said steadily, "I think Dick made no request about it, but she has been constantly with him, and knows his feelings on most subjects."

"And do you think it wise to let a child of her age decide such questions?"

John had given his mother his own impression of Mary's age, before going to Germantown, and had never corrected his statement since finding out his mistake. It had never seemed necessary to mention the subject. Now, however, he felt himself guilty of absolute duplicity when he let her remark go unchallenged, but he was a coward in the face of Mary's sixteen years. His mother would inevitably look on her as a young lady, and how could he make her understand? It was suddenly laid bare to his accusing conscience that he had a reason, and what that reason was, for wishing to postpone the meeting between the two. It was his turn to dread his mother's eye, and the sugaring of his strawberries seemed to require very close attention, as he remarked, rather lamely, that he had never thought the wearing of mourning a matter of any importance, it was a question of feeling only.

There was a short pause in which conscience put in some solid work; then he said in as matter-of-fact a voice as he could command: "I was mistaken about her age, Mother, and perhaps I gave you a wrong impression. She is nearly sixteen; and though she is entirely a child in her ways, she has a very mature

judgment in matters of principle and feeling." Mrs. Brown said nothing.

"I can't tell how things may turn out later;" he calmly changed the subject, feeling the look his mother gave him, even if he did not see it, "nor what there may be to do. Of course Dick's property is all left to Mary, with provision for her education and immediate needs; but it is in trust, not only till her majority, but for life—to revert to her children if she have any—and I am sole trustee. It is not a large estate, and Dick wanted me to do as I thought best about selling the old house or renting it. He left a generous bequest of five thousand each to the cousin who has lived in the house, and to Catharine, Mary's nurse. In the event of Mary's death without heirs, the property reverts to me, with the informal understanding that I am to use it for the benefit of girls who are left alone in the world, and have a living to make; and I am to leave it where I think it will help most."

Mrs. Brown showed her appreciation of the confidence reposed in her, and was, moreover, touched by the confidence shown in John. She spoke with cordial approval of the will, and especially of the wisdom of not giving Mary control of her money when she came of age. "Dick Farnham knew by experience that no power can prevent her throwing herself away on a rascal, if one happens to take her fancy, and he has had the sense to guard against her coming to want through her own fault. Is she like her mother? You said *she* was very handsome. Is Mary pretty?"

"Yes, she looks a good deal like her mother as I remember her," John admitted as though unwillingly.

"And is she likely to be as beautiful?" Mrs Brown persisted.

"She is far more beautiful now." Again the words seemed rather wrung from him than volunteered. The voice was without enthusiasm.

"H'm!" A very pregnant exclamation, though hardly uttered aloud. "I am afraid she is likely to give you a good deal of trouble, John. People are always piling their troubles on your shoulders; but this is by far the biggest load you have ever had to carry. Miss Newlin is a fine woman, and a good church-woman. She will teach her good morals, and sound religious beliefs, besides giving her a good education and good manners. I suppose she is very backward, as she hasn't been to school?"

"I am going to look into that a little, myself, before consulting with Miss Newlin. She, poor woman, is so overworked just now, with their closing exercises, that she has only been able to see Mary once. She was out for a little while yesterday, but she could not even get to the funeral to-day. Mary saw something of her in Lausanne, several years ago, and took to her so kindly that it settled the question of her schooling in Dick's mind. He told me he would have brought her over a year ago, and settled at——, near the school, so that Mary could attend, as a day scholar; but his doctor absolutely forbade his thinking of it. It was this same Dr. Holman who crossed over with him this year when he found that Dick was determined to come at all hazards. He suspected that the end

was not far off, but had no idea how soon it would come. He had come at a great sacrifice of time (which Dick made good as far as money went) and he had to go back at once, but if he had only known the outcome, he would have waited over at least one steamer. He sailed from New York on Saturday morning without knowing that—”

John choked, and it was some time before he resumed: “Miss Newlin is very much in need of rest, and is to go off somewhere (I forget where) as soon as school closes—on the eighth, I think she said. She would be willing to take Mary, but Dick thought she would be happier with Catharine, and I promised him that I would be on hand to do what I could.”

His mother did not dare to express all the disappointment and disapproval she felt at his thus “sacrificing” himself. She knew it would be useless, at present. Mrs. Brown was one of those women who, with a commanding presence, an imperious temper, and really good executive ability, combine a very dependent and timid nature, that always surprises those who find it out. Though not by nature either tolerant or loving, she was capable of great kindness and generosity toward those who touched her sympathies, and of intense affection for those who belonged to her. She had made her husband’s every wish her law, and felt that she would sacrifice anything in the world for this adored son; but there were two things that she never even considered sacrificing—the first place in his heart, and his constant companionship. They were her natural, and inalienable, right. The very thought of his leaving her for a visit to Dick in Europe

had several times been enough to fret her into so real an attack of ill health that he had each time given up the plan. To do her justice, it never occurred to her that John could be so happy anywhere as with her, and she spared no pains to satisfy every creature want to which man is heir. That this particular man was somewhat indifferent to creature comforts, and had a big hungry heart and soul beyond her comprehension, was a fact that she always partly, but never fully, realized. The half acknowledgment of it was the most real pain she knew, and yet it did not prevent her fretting, and worrying him in an infinite variety of ways. She resented the escape from her supremacy of even a part of his nature; and was jealously on the alert for rivals in his interests and affections.

She had done her utmost to spoil him, as a child, but the material in hand was incapable of being spoiled. George Raymond had lately described him as "six feet and a half of pure gold, and perfect gentleman," and the child had been father of the man. He was not "goody," he was just good. Honest, bright, unselfish, full of fun, intensely alive to all that was beautiful and good, as well as to all that was incongruous or droll; quickly kindled to indignation at injustice, or enthusiasm for the right; the only fault that either father or mother could find in him was that he lacked "a proper spirit"; he was "too tame." "I don't understand him," Mr. Brown had once remarked to a friend. "He has sense enough to know when he's imposed upon, but not spunk enough to resent it. He isn't a coward, but he seems to lack red blood somewhere!"

When, in his fourteenth year, Rev. Phillips Brooks, who was soon to resign the charge of Holy Trinity parish, asked him, in his mother's presence, about joining the Church, John instantly acquiesced. "I don't know that I can ever understand the Creeds, or the catechism," he had said simply, "but I should like to be as much like Christ as I can."

Mr. Brooks had answered him only by a look and a warm handclasp, reserving further conversation for a *tête-à-tête*; but Mrs. Brown had been somewhat abashed. No one could accuse John of conceit or presumption, but she wondered whether the rector's silence did not mean that he considered such an idea slightly sacrilegious. She was one of the many staunch admirers of the great preacher, who listened with rapt attention to his every utterance, feeling sure that they endorsed his every sentiment, and never in the least understanding what were his real beliefs. She rarely spoke to John of religious questions, beyond suggesting the outward observance of certain forms and ceremonies; but she was always conscious of that under-world of thought and feeling which she could not read, and to which he rarely gave expression. Was it wonderful that Dick Farnham, who did understand him well, should have said his "Nunc Dimittis" from his heart of hearts, with the sound of this man's promise in his ear, and the sight of this man's arm around his cherished child?

CHAPTER VI

THE GULF OF YEARS

CATHARINE'S cottage was only five minutes distant from the railway station on the shaded country road. There was no village, properly speaking, at the time of which I write; for the handful of houses, scattered on both sides of the track, could not have been dignified by any such name. Though inside the city limits, and not far from several flourishing suburbs, its rural loveliness had thus far been spared the encroachments of the army of city commuters, so soon to gain possession there. The land about it was held by people tenacious of their old properties, and jealous of their privacy. The old, long established families were breaking up, however, and it would not be many years before this secluded little section would follow the example of its neighbors.

As John turned a curve in the road that brought the house into view, his eager eyes were gladdened by the sight of a girlish figure coming quickly toward him along the path. She seemed very subdued, however, as, the first greeting over, they moved hand in hand toward the cottage. "Mr. Brown, I was sorry I made you miss your train last night," she said finally, the tears sounding again in her voice. John only answered by a close pressure of the hand he held, but she was

satisfied. She made no further apology. She glanced once or twice, with some curiosity, at a bulky parcel he was carrying in his left hand, but she asked no questions. He saw the glances, however, and supplied the information as soon as they reached the little porch, and he could deposit his burden. Then, with a cordial handclasp for Catharine, who appeared in the door, he proceeded at once to untie the package, or bundle of packages, securely tied together. As he produced two light, jointed, bamboo easels, two camp stools—one of very sturdy make—a pair of drawing-pads and some minor articles, he watched the brightness of pleased understanding grow in Mary's face.

"How good of you to remember!" she said, with a warm blush. "There are two of everything! For you and me." It was not a question. "Yes, I thought we could have some good times experimenting around here when I get back." (Mary had spoken of her wish to learn to sketch.) "I am going to take my mother to Boston, to-morrow, to start her for North East Harbor, so we won't be able to work together for a couple of days, but I have two or three flat studies here for you to try your hand on, meantime, if you like, and I shall be anxious to see what progress you have made when I get back." John was talking against time—a new thing for him. He gave his closest attention to the unwrapping of the rest of his treasures, which included a very complete outfit of moist colors and brushes; but when he did at last look up, he saw that the transient brightness was gone from Mary's face, and eyes and lips were quietly sad. She said nothing.

"I have my own paint-box," he went on quickly; "I hadn't time to look it up this morning, but I know it will need some replenishing. I will bring it out on Saturday, and if Catharine will give me my lunch, I will spend the day, and we can do great execution."

"Saturday will be my birthday. Did you know it, and mean all these for presents?" Mary asked timidly, the color coming back in a flood.

"Yes," he said simply, while the same thought, coming into both minds at once, was telegraphed from eye to eye. Each paid silent tribute to the one loved presence that would be missing from this birthday for the first time in her sixteen years.

"Could you stay and have your supper with Mary this evening, Mr. Brown?" Catharine asked hesitatingly. "She picked the first strawberries this morning and is saving them for you." John's regretful eyes answered Mary's questioning ones.

"I wish I could," he said, "but my visit to-day must be short. Later on I am going to tire you out with my staying. Why mayn't I have the strawberries now?" he asked, still watching Mary's wistful face.

"Would you eat them now?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know any time of day that I couldn't eat strawberries," he answered with convincing enthusiasm, and Mary disappeared like an arrow from the bow. Catharine, with John's help, collected the scattered papers and strings, answering meanwhile his anxious questions as to his new ward's state of mind. They were not altogether reassuring answers; for Mary's realization of her loneliness was coming in full force, after the excitement and stress of the last

few days. They were soon interrupted by the appearance of the child herself—the veriest child she looked as she came toward them with her basket of berries in one hand and a little tray, properly equipped, in the other.

“Oh, Catharine, leave me a piece of paper for my stems,” she said, as Catharine was smilingly passing her with her armload of spoil. John rescued a large piece, and she seated herself on the steps of that end of the porch which was screened by foliage and vines from the view of the few passers-by. He dropped down beside her, spreading the paper out between them.

“You needn’t help me; you’d just get your fingers all stained, and it won’t take me a minute,” she remarked briskly. Service for those she loved was second nature to her, and thus far the service had been all on John’s side.

He acquiesced for reasons of his own, and watched her operations with a sensation as delicious as it was new. In all his life it had never occurred to him to say to any woman in gallantry, that something had been the sweeter for her touch. It as little occurred to him to *say* it now. It pleased him that she was a little awkward in the handling of them, and had perhaps been overeager in the plucking of some. When a calyx refused to come neatly out of its little hole, or left a refractory sepal clinging to the berry, his eyes rested like a caress on the dainty thumb and fingers that went to work at it. Neither of them spoke much. It was not till the saucer showed a more than generous heap that he suddenly called a halt, and asked her if she wanted to make him sick.

"Were you ever sick?" she asked, looking incredulously at his stalwart figure.

"Well, I have a memory of measles, or chicken-pox, or some itchy complaint, but it is a good while back," he confessed smiling.

"Oh, I must get the sugar and cream!" she exclaimed, starting up to go for them, but John stopped her with a gesture. "No, no; I don't want any," he said.

"Don't you like them?" She seemed surprised. "Catharine gets lovely rich cream from the H——'s (mentioning the owners of the neighboring estate, whose herd of cows was visible, grazing in the opposite meadow).

"Yes, I like them very much, sometimes, but—I would rather have these just as they are." He had not meant to make any special emphasis, but something in his voice and manner struck her.

"Because I stemmed them for you?" she asked shyly.

If the babe in the cradle had put such a question to him, John could hardly have been more startled and confused. He could not summon a word in reply; but fortunately none was needed. Some memory, evidently born of her own words, had brought the sudden tears to her eyes and made her turn her face away. John understood. Nurtured from babyhood in the atmosphere of Dick's loverlike tenderness, it had not needed a precocious clairvoyance to make her recognize a sentiment that was no new one to her. Poor child! He took the hand nearest him, and gazed down on its ~~stained fingers~~ with an overwhelm-

ing desire to press them to his lips, to pour out something of the flood of feeling pent up within him. The temptation was only momentary; the next instant his eyes met hers smilingly.

"I ought to go in and wash them," she said, looking down, too, on her imprisoned fingers; "but I want to see you eat your strawberries first."

He took the little tray and raised the spoon. "But I feel so greedy eating all by myself. One has to have company to enjoy a treat," he said quizzically.

Mary immediately turned over a leaf of her book, and showed him a new face—a face bright with mischief, and a dash of coquetry—as she moved nearer to him, picked up a very large berry from his plate, and took a bite.

"Now do you feel better?" she asked. "I got the very biggest one."

"Not all of it!" repossessing himself of the half that was left.

Catharine stopped her work inside, and listened in pleased surprise. It was years since she had heard that little rippling, infectious laugh that came to her through the open window. It fell like music on her ears, and not on hers alone. John had forgotten Mary's troubles, and his; and was a light-hearted boy for the moment. She took another berry and made herself secure against rebates. For the length of time it took them to empty that plate they were both children. John was drinking stronger wine than the juice of the berries; but all at once the little laugh was hushed, and Marv turned another leaf and

grew shy. She interlaced her fingers, palms upward, on her knees, as children do when they have made "the church and steeple," and suddenly reverse it and show "the parson and all the people"; and with her eyes on this berry-stained congregation she asked timidly: "Mr. Brown, would you like me to call you Uncle John?"

"No!" John said bluntly.

She raised startled, half incredulous eyes to his face; the curves of her lips were both proud and sensitive. How odd and still he looked! All the fun and youth had gone out of his face. He was not joking; she saw that. "You mustn't take me too seriously," he said hastily, seeing his blunder. "I am just a cranky old bachelor, but I should be glad to have you call me whatever you like."

Her eyes fell, and she grew deeply thoughtful.

She was only partly reassured. He was not offended, but the great change in his face had not been caused by "crankiness." She was too intelligent not to see that she had touched some sensitive spot; perhaps stirred some painful memory. She had meant to please him and she had only hurt! Her lips quivered:

"I only thought 'Mr. Brown' seemed so formal, when I—when we—I should like to *pretend* I was some relation to you."

There was a moment's silence; then he said in a low, constrained voice, as timid as hers had been: "Mary, would you be willing"—he leaned far forward and picked up a twig that had fallen on the lowest step—"would you—just—call me John?"

"Oh, yes," she said readily, almost eagerly; "would you like that?"

"I should like it—very much." He straightened himself and glanced keenly at her to see whether the suggestion had discomposed her; whether she seemed to find it strange. No, her eyes met his, bright with feeling, and frankly loving.

The gulf of years that her proposal had opened between them was lessened, but not bridged. John did not deceive himself. He suspected that she would have called Mr. Lincoln, "Abraham," with equal readiness.

After he had helped her to carry in the remains of the strawberry festival she got her new paint-box and the studies, and went over them with a child's eager anticipation, reading the name on each paint, and inquiring the shades of those that were new to her, drawing the soft brushes lovingly across her fingers, and examining the flower studies.

"I think I will wait for you to commence—John"—just a trifle of shy hesitation before the new title—"I could never do these by myself."

"Oh, yes, you could! Try this simple part first," John said easily, only showing by a sudden soft brightness in his eyes the pleasure his name gave him so spoken. He had always thought it very prosaic before.

Why he should have stood long before his dressing-glass that night studying his dark, rugged face with a quite new interest, and have turned away with a muttered exclamation very like "blue mud"; and why he should have scanned, with such grave wistful-

ness, the faces of the Yale students who bustled, hatless and eager, about the New Haven platform next day, greeting the many complacent matrons and blushing maidens that the Boston train set down there, the experienced reader may be able to guess.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH CATHARINE HEARS OF KING ARTHUR

THAT evening after John left them, Catharine and Mary ate their simple supper in almost unbroken silence. The good woman's mind was full of memories of the honest face that, for four years, had beamed upon her from the opposite side of the little table. Mary's loss had brought her own freshly to her mind, and had wakened besides a throng of older memories. When they betook themselves to the little parlor, so hung about and decorated with samples of Mary's childish handiwork, and souvenirs of the life abroad, she took the girl's bright head on her lap, and made no effort to check the tears that rolled down her cheeks and dropped on the neatly braided hair, flecked with gold in the lamplight.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," she said penitently, after a long silence, making a poor business of drying her eyes. "I dare say Mr. Brown feels most as bad as we do, but he's always cheerful and bright, and he makes you cheerful right away," she said the last words with a twinge of involuntary jealousy.

"Yes, but I don't think he's exactly trying to be cheerful. There seems a kind of happiness in him

that sorrow couldn't change." Mary seemed considering the meaning of her own words. "Father said he was the best man he ever knew; but that isn't the reason I just love him. I don't like good people—oh, you know what I mean!" as Catharine remonstrated. "I don't know what there is about him, but I love him to touch me; I love to get close to him. He makes me happy all over even in the midst of being so lonely and sad. Father understands."

There was a long silence while Mary's wet eyes roamed from object to object in the cosy room. "So many things in this room make me want to cry, and yet I just love to look at them. I remember when father let me buy that ch  let for you for a surprise, and the Bernese doll. I was sure you would like them because I did."

"And so I did, dearie, I often go over the old days when I'm dustin' in here. Mr. Brown was so interested lookin' around here, when you were upstairs."

"He says I may call him John," Mary said, with an approach to shyness at the recollection.

"Did you ask him that, Mary?" Catharine inquired, scandalized.

"No, not exactly. I asked him if he would like me to call him 'Uncle John,' and he said he would rather I just called him John." Both lapsed into "brown studies" with capital Bs. Mary did not feel like repeating all the words of that dialogue, or speaking of John's emotion, or her own conjectures as to the cause of it. She saw no special significance in it, but it seemed a sort of involuntary confidence

not to be divulged to anyone. It was the manner of that asking and offering that Catharine would most have liked to know; but she only stroked Mary's hair gently, trying to read her averted face the while, and not succeeding. She marveled at the wonderful intimacy so quickly sprung up between these two; but John's manner to his new ward had no trace of that indescribable something that she had often seen and hated in the behavior of middle-aged or elderly men toward young girls thrown into intimate relations with them. She had watched them together with an instinctive appreciation of his great delicacy and reserve. She saw that he was ready to respond to the least appeal for sympathy and love; and had not Mary just frankly acknowledged her wish for his caresses? But Catharine saw, too, that he refrained from touching her except when he felt her need. A feeling of apprehension, almost of pity, was fast taking the place of even the tiny spark of jealousy in her simple heart. By some occult connection of ideas her mind was drawn to an event of a few weeks before.

"Mary," she said with a brisk change of voice, "do you remember little Jack Wurts that you used to play with?"

"I think I do, but maybe I only remember remembering. Father was talking to me one day about having grown so patient and gentle—as if anybody could help being gentle with him—and he reminded me of the time I bit Jack, and some other things I did when I was little. But I'm not the least bit patient; I get awfully cross at people yet, and I've

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seen some people I'd like to bite if I could use somebody else's teeth to do it with. Did I ever slap or bite you, Catharine?"

"No, my precious, ye were the best dispositioned child I ever saw, and happy from morning till night. Ye did things some people might call naughty, but never an ugly, mean one, and you always had the sweetest, little, cunning, lovin' ways with ye."

Mary drew the labor-rough hand from her hair and kissed it in spite of Catharine's resistance. She was very strong even with the indoor life which had so worried her father.

"Catharine," she said suddenly, with a far-off look in her eyes, and a soft color on her cheeks, "I can hardly wait till I get old enough to get married and have a whole lot of little children!"

"Lord love ye," was Catharine's sole, astonished rejoinder. "And what about ye'r husband?"

"I don't know what I want my husband to be like. Once I told father I wanted to marry a man like the King Arthur at Innsbrück, and he laughed and said he would look very different in ordinary clothes, and armor was unhandy for every day." Then, with a sudden recollection of Catharine's loss of husband and child, and of her own great loss, she rose and threw her arms around the motherly neck with a sympathy entirely womanly. Catharine's ready tears came again, but she was thinking of the future as well as of the past while she heartily returned the embrace.

"The good Lord grant ye a King Arthur and all the children ye want, my dearie," she said aloud,

and added to herself, "and there'll be a many ready to fill King Arthur's place, I'm thinkin'."

"And you are to come and live with me, and I will name one of them after you." Mary was laughing now at her own childish conceit, but something had been stirred within her that kept her dreaming until Catharine reminded her that it was time for sleeping dreams.

Later, when Catharine came to "tuck her in" and give her the usual good-night kiss, Mary said rather shamefacedly: "Catharine, never tell anybody what I was talking about."

"And who would I be telling?" Catharine asked sadly, in spite of wonder and amusement. Later, as she returned to her own widowed couch, she said to herself: "It's not me that will be tellin' Mr. Brown about yer King Arthurs; he'll find 'em out soon enough, I'm afraid."

Next morning, while they were clearing away the breakfast dishes, she suddenly recalled an interrupted topic of last night.

"Mary, ye put me out so with yer gettin'-married talk that I never finished telling ye that I saw Mrs. Wurts on the street one day not long ago, and she knew me at once, and asked all manner o' questions about yer father and you. Of course I didn't know then that he was thinkin' of comin' home, nor all that was ahead of us." She drew the back of her hand across her eyes, and continued, "but I told her a good deal. She said Jack was a scholar at one o' those big colleges (I forget the name of it now; I hardly noticed it, anyhow, I was that upset talkin'

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of old times). She was sorry to hear about *my* troubles, too. She's a right nice lady, and she thought a lot of yer father. I could see she felt terrible bad to hear what had come to him. He was as straight and strong as a pine tree when she knew him."

"Father always said he believed people's bodies would match their souls in Heaven, and I have been thinking a great many times that he must be the most beautiful, straight, strong man there—except Jesus."

She had been interested to hear of Mrs. Wurts; but the other interest, suggested by that train of thought, swallowed up all minor ones.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A TAILOR'S GOOSE

MISS NEWLIN spent an afternoon with Mary before betaking herself to the quiet mountain resort where she planned a modified rest cure. She was a woman whose strong frame, broad shoulders, and resolute, energetic carriage suggested robust health, but she had in reality only made an indomitable will do the work of a strong constitution, and nature was taking her revenge now in periods of extreme fatigue which her doctor warned her was an indication of an overtaxed heart. It was on one of her quests for renewed strength that she had come upon Dick Farnham in his retired corner, and led by womanly sympathy as much as by old association, had become rapidly intimate with him, and warmly interested in Mary. Remembering Margaret Brown's school-days, Dick had often thought of Miss Newlin as a possible solution of the problem of Mary's future; but a voyage home was strictly forbidden him, and he saw no prospect of carrying out any such plan. When Providence seemed to have so opportunely brought them together, he eagerly grasped at the friendship, feeling more and more that the time could not be far off when the child would be in sore need of it.

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Miss Newlin was a woman of unusual power both of mind and soul, and withal capable of great tenderness toward those who came close enough to her to awaken it. The prevailing sentiment that she inspired, in school and out, was a respectful awe, more or less mixed with admiration. In her presence one felt the contact with a great personality, and smallness always shrank back under the gaze of her wonderfully penetrating and expressive little brown eyes. Her somewhat low forehead, from which the hair was uncompromisingly drawn back and twisted into a round knob, would not have suggested ideality, nor would the square jaw and high cheek-bones; but one had only to hear her read great poetry, or noble oratory; had only to see her plain, strong face transfigured with the glow of an inward fire, to realize that he was in the presence of one of the world's mute poets and seers; of a great spirit that could only find its wings through communion with other great spirits. Mary was too really simple to be intimidated by the reputation of learning in others, and she had felt herself strongly drawn to Miss Newlin, whose manner toward her father was replete with sympathy and charm; but it was that first time the lady had read aloud to them, which had completed the conquest. The poem she had chosen was Browning's "Saul," and Mary had sat enthralled, looking up at her from the stool at her father's side, and drinking in each phrase of the poet, and tone of the reader, with a soul so kindled by the majesty and beauty of what she only partly comprehended, that she never knew the wonderful brown eyes were no

longer looking at the book, but deep, deep, down into hers.

"O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ
stand!"

The rich, deep voice suddenly ceased. Mary became conscious that it was no longer David who was speaking; that it was Miss Newlin's voice talking to her, and Miss Newlin's strong hand holding hers.

"Child, I must have you one of these days. Oh, I will take your father too!"

The meetings at Germantown and Fernwood, after nearly two years' separation, had been more conventional, however full of sympathetic gentleness on the one hand and grateful response on the other. Miss Newlin was tired out, and the very spirit within her was dimmed; and Mary had been too full of her trouble and too much in awe of that future which Miss Newlin represented, to have much to say. John's coming had been welcome to them both.

That wondrous month of June found John, day after day, at Fernwood, and when he was not there in the flesh (the term is singularly inappropriate to him) he was there in the spirit.

John Patterson and his wife Hannah, who had married in Mrs. Brown's service ten years before, and felt themselves as much a part of the family as though they had been born into it, had many chats together

over "Mr. John's child"; and both had a consuming curiosity to see her. John filled the post of butler, and would also have been valet *con amore* to John Brown, if that gentleman's simple habits had admitted of such a functionary. Brushing his clothes or blacking his boots was all John Patterson ever seemed able to find to do for his beloved employer; while to Hannah, who combined the light duties of chambermaid with those of attendance on Mrs. Brown, was accorded the more intimate joy of "making up his room," not to mention the delights of darning his stockings and sewing on his buttons. Both had a sincere respect and admiration for Mrs. Brown, who was their ideal of what a real lady and a good mistress ought to be; but for "Mr. John" their regard was of a kind that bordered upon idolatry. It was the keenest regret to them both that he had never married, but as they saw no likelihood of that, they wished that, at least, he would bring this child home. Only they did have some misgivings as to their mistress' acceptance of such an arrangement.

"John," said "Mr. John" one warm morning late in the month, "it seems to me that these thin trousers have got a little baggy in the knees. What do you think?"

"So they have, sir," John Patterson rejoined with alacrity, "and I could run around and let Tom Ford press the whole suit for you this morning, if you'd just change before you go out. They'd look a lot better." John acquiesced with a gratified smile.

"Well, I declare!" said his humble adorer to Hannah, "I never knew him to notice that before! I'm

goin' to get a tailor's goose and board and keep a crease in all his trousers. I'd ought to thought o' that long ago. It seems to me he looks younger lately, and carries himself straighter."

Even Mary began to notice a difference in him, though she was not versed enough in matters of male attire to attribute the change to unrumped coats and freshly creased trousers. Personal appearance in "King Arthur" was really important, but in "John"—she had got well used to the title in those intimate weeks—it didn't make a bit of difference.

"John, why did you never want to get married?" she asked one morning, looking up suddenly from her work, and fixing a grave, inquiring gaze full upon him.

He noted the use of the past-definite with a twinge, but it was with a quizzical smile that he turned to her. "How do you know that I never did?"

She answered the smile with one so frankly loving as to preclude all idea of coquetry in dealing with this very personal topic. If her color rose, it was with affectionate interest.

"I think if you really wanted anything very much" (present tense now) "you'd get it—unless"—with a subdued afterthought—"it might harm somebody else."

If she dropped her eyes it was only for the prosaic reason that her brush had fallen from her hand in the moment of absorption. John quickly restored it to her with a merry little laugh. She thanked him with hardly a glance; she was intent on seeing whether the falling brush had stained her skirt;

but he wanted another look into those wells of truth. He would make her turn to him again.

"Suppose," he said solemnly, "I had wanted to marry someone very much, and she would not have me?" His purpose was instantly effected; the paint-brush was again in imminent danger, while eyes of startled incredulity tried to discover some twinkle in his, and saw only an inscrutable gravity. Her color rose high, and her lips half opened. Suddenly the dimples appeared and the eyelids fell; "I almost believed you," she said with the half-embarrassed little laugh of one who has been the easy victim of a practical joke. No finished coquette could have expressed so subtle a flattery. Nature is always the mistress of art. The lowered lashes of the coquette would have tried to imply something else, however, which this child of nature never thought of.

John called himself a fool for the unreasoning gladness that shot through him; it was dampened in a moment.

"Do you think I am too old ever to think of such a thing now?" he asked with teasing gravity.

"No-o, I suppose not," with sudden seriousness, "but I do hope you won't!"

The very idea was so disturbing that she pushed back and overturned her stool, while she fell upon her knees on the grass at John's side and leaned her head against his arm. The arm came around her at once, but John's voice was strange. "You needn't be afraid," he said quietly, "I shall never belong to anybody but you."

Her quick ear detected the new note in his tone, and it marred the relief she felt at his assurance. "Oh, John, I know I ought to want you to get married if you would really be happy ever after."

"But I wouldn't. I shall have a much better time looking after you," he said, smiling down into her upturned, wistful face.

CHAPTER IX

A "SPOILED CHILD"

"I SUPPOSE my sketch must wait to-day, as John isn't coming;—unless I go over there myself," Mary said disconsolately, one warm day in early July, as she sat in the shade by Catharine on the little back porch, shelling peas.

"Why couldn't ye sketch the buttonwood tree? Ye're so fond of looking at it," Catharine answered soothingly.

"It's too hard; I could never do it; but I was so interested in those lovely posts and the piece of stone wall. Why couldn't we *both* go over there after dinner, Catharine? There are ever so comfortable places to sit, and you could sew, and I could work on my sketch and surprise John. He works so much faster than I do. Besides, you've never been over there once, and you ought to see how pretty it is."

The object of discussion was the partly ruined barn-yard of a deserted farm a quarter of a mile away. It was a most picturesque spot and also a singularly lonely one, which they had discovered on a ramble a few days before, and had immediately seized upon as a perfect subject for sketching. The beautiful summer weather was well fitted for outdoor work of a quiet kind, and she grudged this exquisite

day. Truth to tell, John had so spoiled her that she felt almost aggrieved if a day passed without seeing him. "It's a wonder he don't try his hand on ye," Catharine thought, as her eyes rested on the picture before her; "but I doubt paint could ever make the color of her eyes or the little shiny places on her hair." It was her opinion that Mr. Brown would give a good sum for the picture if it could be done.

"Well, I don't mind," was her indulgent response to Mary's proposal. She much preferred her comfortable rocker on the porch to an "ever so" comfortable stump or bench on the ground; and it was a warm day, but she could not bring herself to throw cold water on any pleasure of this darling of her heart, even though it meant a much greater inconvenience to herself. In her secret heart she was still a little jealous of Mr. Brown, both for herself and Mr. Farnham. It astonished her that Mary could seem really happy with anyone so soon after her great loss. "No child ever loved her father better than she did," she ruminated; and she had felt that it would take her utmost efforts to rouse her charge from despair. She almost resented the fact that this man, who had been a comparative stranger only a little while ago, could so occupy the child's thoughts that there was hardly any time left to indulge in grief. She told herself that it was because Mary connected him with her father and remembered her father's great fondness for him; and she often heard them talking of Dick with tears in their eyes; but it was wonderful "all the same." With the tact and fine feeling of a native gentlewoman, she always spoke

to Mary of John's affection as not only a natural, but an inevitable thing, and of his constant visits as the faithful and glad fulfilling of a trust; but in her own mind she knew that she had never seen a trust accepted and carried out in just this spirit, and to this extent, and she was convinced that the short intervals between John's visits were all too long to him.

Mary was in haste to be off as soon as her midday dinner was swallowed, but Catharine demurred. It was too hot, and she must take time to "clear up and fix herself up a little" before going out on the road. Finally Mary urged her to let her go on ahead with her apparatus and she (Catharine) could follow at her leisure.

"I will wipe the dishes and put them away for you," she said, "and then you can take your time about changing your dress. You know the lane, and it's only a step after you turn in, and nobody ever comes there. It's shady nearly all the way," she ended, "and I don't call it hot to-day!"

Catharine made many objections, but her headstrong "child" overruled them all, and finally wheedled her into a reluctant consent. Mary allowed no retracting when the dishes were put away; and Catharine saw her start off, with easel and painting outfit, at a gait suggestive of October frosts.

"I must hurry up and get ready," she said to herself; "I oughtn't to have let her go around by herself, but I couldn't bear to deny her. She's seemed low-spirited all the morning." Again the little jealous pang shot through her and made her scold herself

vigorously as she hurried about and got well heated up before starting.

Mary, meantime, found it comfortable to slacken her energetic pace. As she walked along under the overhanging branches, she made a picture that any one might have been excused for turning to look at, and in which no one but Mrs. Grundy could have discovered a flaw. That exacting lady would unquestionably have criticized the "hang" of her blue gingham skirt and the fit of the simple waist; but to the artist, the bit of white throat exposed would have condoned the sagging collar, and he would have rejoiced in the overlong sleeves which made the turning back of the frills almost a necessity. Whether the nondescript young man who passed her near the entrance to the farm lane was an artist or not, this true history cannot undertake to say; but it is an undisputed fact that he not only stared her out of countenance in passing, but turned and looked after her in a much livelier manner than one would have believed possible in seeing him mount the hill a little while before.

Mary had a rather uncomfortable sensation, but she was "not a bit afraid." He wouldn't dare say anything to her, and she was "plenty big enough and old enough to look out for herself!" She did not know that she was a bait for just this sort of fish, but she was conscious as she turned down the lane, that he was looking back after her, and she almost wished she had waited for Catharine. She went resolutely forward, however, and reached the barnyard quite reassured. She put up her easel and camp-

stool, and filled her water-can at a pipe through which a spring eternally trickled into a disused sheep-trough near by. What a very quiet place it was! It seemed so different without John. She thought she would not come again till he was with her, but now she would make the most of her time and surprise him. She would put in the dark background behind those beautiful round posts, whose whiteness was tempered by so many spots of delicious, mouldy, licheny color. The ragged edge of the overhanging hay-loft was not quite right in her drawing; she wished she had John's to look at. This sun made perfect light and shade. She was sure that sepia was too brown to use in the shadow; neutral tint with a touch of rose and green and yellow would be best, but there *was* a brownish color, especially in the corner.

"You've got a very pretty place for your work, Miss," a voice said not far from her. She was startled beyond all power of self-possession. How could he have got there without her seeing or hearing him? There was something sinister in that fact, as well as in the look on his face, which turned her hot and cold, she hardly knew why. His tone was quite respectful, but his eyes were—well, anyhow she hated and feared him.

"Now if I knew how to paint I would never waste my time on an old shack like that." He approached her without haste, as though to look at the sketch. She had risen at sight of him, and now lifted the stool with some undefined purpose. He turned his leering eyes on her face as she drew back. "I would paint something better worth while." Mary's emotion

only heightened the "worth while," and he moved another step toward her.

"But I'd just as soon have a kiss as a picture, and I like 'em all the better when they're not too easy to get."

He made a sudden attempt to seize the camp-stool and her waist at the same time, but she was lithe and robust. She drew away like a flash, and brought the legs of the stool around across his face with a suddenness and strength that sent him reeling backward. He was livid now, but he took a moment to collect himself before beginning a second round with this young Amazon; and that moment she used to advantage. Throwing the stool as far behind her as she could, she seized the easel and rushed at him, swinging its long, tough legs from side to side in truly formidable style. Too astonished to do more than raise his arm to his head, the cowardly ruffian received a blow that sent him down on the ground like a log, with no inclination to get up at once. Mary did not stop to see whether she might have killed him, but took to her heels with as much energy as she had shown in the fight, never letting go her weapon. She did not slacken speed till she reached the road and saw Catharine's matronly figure advancing under the trees not far off; then she gave a look behind, but could see no one.

Catharine's heated face took on a look of absolute terror as Mary rushed toward her, and its expression was not altered for the better when she had heard the gasping recital. She was far more alarmed than her ignorant, wrong-headed charge, who treated the

matter, now that it was over, as almost a joke, and was not a little elated at her own performance. On that point Catharine did not gainsay her. She had had many experiences of the independence and resourcefulness of this young person as a child, but she was amazed at her coolness and presence of mind now. The last weeks had gone far to prove her more dependent than of old.

The trouble was that she seemed to have no conception of the seriousness of the matter, and Catharine hesitated to open her eyes, or give her more fear than was necessary for prudence. If only Mr. Brown were here! But what would he say to *her* for her dereliction from duty? (For thus she put it to herself.) She had hardly a word to answer to Mary's excited chatter as they traversed the short distance to their own gate. She felt so sick and faint, it seemed to her that she would never be able to reach that longed-for haven, and in spite of the heat her face was as nearly white as the nature of her complexion permitted.

Great was their astonishment to see John's tall figure coming toward them from the porch, where he had waited, not knowing which way to look for them. There was no time to find out the cause of his unexpected and welcome appearance, for his first glance at the two faces told him that something unusual and exciting had happened. The soft rings of hair about Mary's face and neck were dripping with perspiration. He took out his handkerchief, shook out its immaculate folds and dried her hot face as though she had been a little child, asking,

in some anxiety, for an explanation. It was not immediately forthcoming.

Catharine's tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and Mary was considering where to begin when his eye fell on the broken easel. He grasped her arm almost fiercely, and asked what it meant. Mary, to do her justice, made no more than necessary of the story, and tried to clear Catharine of the blame with which that penitent soul was heaping herself. She ended with, "he was nothing but a sneak who thought he could go about kissing girls"; but John's face frightened her before she reached this point, and his grasp of her arm hurt her so much that she cried out. He relaxed his hold, but in mechanical fashion, without asking her pardon. He asked instead, so fiercely that she drew away from him: "*Did* he kiss you? Did he *touch* you?" Again he almost shook her.

"Do you think I would let him?" she rejoined with offended dignity. Then she added with pardonable pride: "I swung the easel around as hard as I could and hit him on the head, and he fell down, and I ran away as fast as lightning."

"She may have killed him, for he never followed her, and those legs have brass points!" was Catharine's excited comment. Without waiting for another word, John was off at top speed.

"What did he want to do?" Mary wondered. "To find out whether the man was dead? Of course he wasn't dead!" A nervous shudder went through her at the idea. "He was just a coward who didn't dare come after her!"

John was back in an incredibly short time, carrying the remains of the scattered sketching outfit and drying his face in much more vigorous fashion than he had followed with Mary's. Only Catharine was on the porch to greet him. He told her briefly that he had seen no one, and had found only the scattered objects which he still held. He had hurried back for fear of the villain's lurking somewhere near the cottage. He sank down on the nearest chair, and Catharine forebore any comment, seeing that he was utterly unnerved. He looked like a man enduring some sharp physical pain.

"Where is Mary?" he asked after a long silence.

"She went up to her room."

"Would you send her down to me? I want to speak to her," he said wearily.

It must be confessed that our heroine was not in an admirable frame of mind; for she had been much hurt at John's incomprehensible behavior to her. "She ought not to have gone to the farm alone, perhaps, but it wasn't a very dreadful thing to do; and he had looked at her so sternly he frightened her, and had hurt her arm badly." She looked in the glass at the injured member as she changed her damp clothes, and tears rose to her eyes as she saw the marks of his powerful fingers distinct on the white skin. They came still faster as she told herself that her father would never have been so harsh with her. He would have understood why she had been impatient to commence her work, and he would have praised her for being brave and self-reliant; he had tried to teach her to be independent, but John had

never thought of that! She had been more nervous than she knew, and she found it hard to stop crying, once fairly launched on the luxurious course of self-pity. But she was not going to cry before John; she was going to be very dignified and let him see that he had offended her, and make him beg her pardon for being so rough. The memory of all his tenderness and care rose up in her throat and choked her, but "she had never done anything he disapproved before."

When she heard his returning steps she hastened her toilet and bathed her eyes. She was arrayed in a fresh white lawn frock, with her favorite blue ribbons, when Catharine came to seek her, and she drew out a string of gold beads that the Swiss doctor had given her, and fastened them around her neck. Some obscure instinct made her want to look as pretty as possible, and as much like a young lady. No such thought had ever entered her head before with reference to John, but she wanted to impress him, and conciliate him at the same time. Her heart was aching as well as her dignity.

"Perhaps he was sorry he had been so cross, and had sent for her to make up," she thought as she went slowly down the stairs. "Perhaps it was just because he was worried."

As she stood for a moment in the doorway, against the dark background of the little entry, she made a picture of such extraordinary loveliness that John was dazzled. He rose, but stood motionless, his grave eyes resting on her with an expression she could not understand; the smile she hoped for did not come, nor any word of regret for being "cross."

"Mary," he said sternly, his brows contracting with what looked like displeasure, "I want you to promise me never to go outside the gate again without Catharine or me."

Mary's lips quivered, but she answered with spirit: "Why, John, I wouldn't think of promising such a thing. I don't want to be penned up like a baby! Lots of *children* go along this road every day!"

John was staggered. He thought she had had an object lesson more effective than any request, but an overpowering sense of his responsibility, a sudden doubt of his power over her, seized him. He recalled the accounts of her waywardness and self-will. What imprudence might she not be capable of? He went toward her and seized her hand: "If you will not do as I ask, I shall have to write to Miss Newlin to let me put you at once under her care," he said.

She shook off his hand, and drew herself up with an air of defiance that made her look years older.

"You wouldn't *dare* to treat me so!" she declared passionately. "I am not a child!"

She had never been more of a spoiled child than at that moment, and if John's unruly heart had not played havoc with his judgment he would have recognized the cause of this ebullition and been partly amused by it. As it was, he winced, and turned as white as though she had struck him in the face. He seemed to himself to be standing at that Rubicon that he had once dreaded, but lately forgotten. He looked steadily in the beautiful, hostile eyes and

believed that he was staking what he cared for most in the world, when he answered as steadily: "I will 'dare' to do what I think right."

Blinded as he was, it required courage worthy of the Victoria Cross to stand to his guns; the next moment the Cross was awarded him. His arm was clasped in both her hands, and her face buried against it. "Oh, John, forgive me," she said brokenly. "I will promise anything you want, only don't send me away from Catharine and from you!"

The revulsion of feeling was so sudden, and overpowering that a short sharp sound like a sob burst from John's swelling chest. He was perfectly still for a moment; then he took the hands from his arm and held them fast. She saw that his eyes were wet.

Mary was in waters beyond her depth. She knew he was not angry with her; but she must have hurt his feelings very much. She wanted some warmer, less solemn token of forgiveness. "Won't you kiss me?" she asked wistfully, and John put a very big stone in his new dyke as he stooped and kissed her cheek.

"I don't know what made me so hateful, John!"

"I think I understand it all very well," John answered, "and I dare say I am unreasonable in my fears. I hate to curtail your liberty in the smallest degree. You need all we can give you." (He was thinking of her long years of confinement.) "But—if I am obliged to be a little tyrannical, some day, perhaps, you will understand and forgive me even a mistake in judgment."

They spent a rather silent evening. All seemed disinclined for conversation, and John's mind and heart were full of matters of which he could not speak. He asked very few questions about the afternoon's adventure. He preferred going without more information to touching again upon that painful subject. He was revolving the chances of bringing the miscreant to account, but felt he could not do that. He would rather leave the man unpunished—fiercely indignant as he felt—than run the risk of bringing this innocent child before a court or magistrate.

He overstayed his usual time, but suddenly recollected that Mary ought to be in bed, and rose to go.

"Mary," he said in a matter-of-fact voice, "I have been thinking that I should like to get away from the hot city for a while, and that I might take you and Catharine to the seashore somewhere for a few weeks." He did not say, "where I could have you constantly under my eye," but one, at least, of his hearers understood and felt a guilty pang.

"It would be great for me," he went on, without waiting for any answer, "and you could have much more liberty to roam around. If you would let me be somewhere in call, I would take a book, and you could try to forget I was anywhere about, and go exactly where you liked without consulting me."

The novel, humble proposition touched Mary to the quick; for she saw that it was perfectly genuine, and without a taint of wounded self-love. She leaned her head against his arm, and, though he could not see her upturned face distinctly in the darkness,

there was a sound of tears in her voice as she said eagerly, "Why, John, I don't *like* to be alone, and I would rather have you with me than anything in the world!"

CHAPTER X

JOHN PLANS A TEST

THAT evening as John reached his solitary home, pondering the events of the day and his new plan, his eye fell on a little book that a cricketing acquaintance had lent him in the morning. "A fascinating study in human nature," he had said. John was fond of studying "human nature"; but if he picked up the book, as he seated himself in his big chair by the library table, it was only to "give himself a countenance." John Patterson looked disapprovingly at the performance. In his opinion it was high time to be going to bed, and he never could see why people wanted to sit up "all hours" and spoil a good night's sleep. John told him that he would attend to closing the windows when he was ready to go up, and the faithful factotum went reluctantly to bed, after warning his master of a threatened shower. If he had seen John sitting motionless hour after hour, without turning a page, his wonder would have turned to anxiety. Now that John's excitement and passion were subsiding—and he had not known that anything *could* so stir him—his thoughts concentrated on the study of "human nature" that was his daily, and, indeed, often his nightly, preoccupation. In this

season of idleness, cut off by the circumstances from even his accustomed sport, and with few associates, and an acknowledged void in his life made by the absence of young womanhood, it was not strange that fate had him in her grasp. He would have been horrified to have thought himself "in love." The term constantly used to describe every shade of passion from the noblest to the most vulgar, would have seemed a positive indelicacy toward this unconscious childhood which was his to guard. And yet he knew that he loved her with aching intensity. This student of facts and righter of wrongs was also a reader of poetry and dreamer of dreams, and had been storing up a hoard of sentiment and passion that he had as little thought of ever spending upon a living woman as the miser has of squandering his treasured gold. He had always put marriage out of his calculations for the simple but sufficient reason that no one who would satisfy his romantic heart (and hearts can be just as romantic in ugly bodies) would ever be at all likely to fall in love with him. He was not entirely humble, nor had he entered the lodge gates of middle age without having encountered soft glances on the highway of life; he did not call himself a "Caliban" nor was he looking for a "Miranda," for, with all his day dreams, he never encroached on that corner of heart or brain where common sense is, or should be, lodged. But he had a very exalted ideal of married life, and felt himself strong enough to set aside any temptation to compromise.

He closed his eyes as the memory of Mary's

frankly offered lips came vividly before them. Could it be possible that she had no sex consciousness at sixteen years? Or was it only that he was so out of the line of possible romance that—? His hands closed tightly over the book on his knee, as the vision of her eyes tormented him. She looked on him as her father's chosen substitute or she would not have thought of kissing him! He tried to recall what Margaret had been like at sixteen. Yes, she had been just sixteen on those first Christmas holidays. He smiled at the recollection of the dinner and theater parties, the cotillions and engagements to walk or skate; the budding romances shyly confided to him who "never thought her silly nor teased her." How fond of her he had been, and how proud of her popularity and quiet *savoir faire*! Affectionate, merry, but perfectly sophisticated, she had managed her little court with a mixture of good humor and dignity very pretty to see, and not the less so for the dash of coquetry that belonged of right to a general favorite. It would not have occurred to her to kiss her father's dearest and most intimate friend, and she would have been confused or offended if he had taken such a liberty. And Mary—could she, however exceptional her upbringing, could she, with a beauty and presence that made Margaret's fair share of good looks a negligible quantity, have the unconsciousness of a little child?

She must miss her father tremendously. It was loneliness and the habit of being fondled that made her constantly invite his caresses; that slipped her hand into his when she wanted comfort. Once he

had drawn his away roughly because she had kissed it, and had told her in peremptory fashion "never to do that." He recalled with a pang of remorse the proud lips and starting tears with which she had told him that "Father never minded." What was there left for him but to be as tenderly paternal as possible and try to efface the impression his rudeness had left?

Would she have looked at him with those clear, unwavering eyes if he had kissed her lips instead of her cheek? He colored hotly at the importunate thought. Her lips were not for him. That closed bud of her womanhood was sacred. But he *must not* kiss her at all! He must wean her from habits that would seem to most people unfitting even now, and would be sure to cause disagreeable comment later on. But not now! Not while she needed all he could give! Boarding school would change everything; meanwhile he would just accept the Garden of Eden that was offered him; for he knew that, this summer past, the angel with the flaming sword would guard the gates.

Would a time ever come—? He put the thought from him, but the memory of her last words brought it back with a force that would not be gainsaid. He had told himself many times, without bitterness, that no woman *could* fall in love with such a downright ugly, uncouth person as he—at least none but a starved and humble one; but might God have given him the one opportunity in a thousand of *training* a woman to love him through dependence upon him, and inner congeniality? * * * * *

George Raymond had just moved his family, which consisted of his mother and two sisters, down to a cottage at Cape May; but he himself was always rather a bird of passage, never taking long vacations, and usually lodging at the Art Club and taking his meals where it chanced. He often dropped in upon John at meal times or of an evening, but now he quizzically remarked that breakfast was the only meal he was sure of.

John hoped much that he would appear on this particular morning, and he was not disappointed. And in five minutes after John Patterson had left them to themselves, as he always did, John Brown had laid his present difficulty before his friend and told him the bald facts of the event of the day before. He eagerly awaited some expression of opinion, which George did not seem in a hurry to give. He was evidently impressed with the gravity of John's responsibility, and made an admiring exclamation when he heard of Mary's rout of the enemy; then he sat silent for some time, quietly eating his breakfast.

"I tell you what it is, old man," he said at last, with the outspokenness they were accustomed to use toward each other, "I think you'll be making a mistake if you try to keep too tight a rein on her. Girls are kittle-cattle, and this one must be independent and plucky. I could tell better what I thought if I saw her once."

"That is just what I was going to suggest," John broke in eagerly. The wish had come to him last night that he might see her behavior with a young man—well—with George at least. George looked as

much younger than his thirty years as John, himself, looked older than his thirty-four, and George was good-looking, graceful, immaculately dressed—together the *comme il faut* man of the world in appearance, with as honest gentleman-like a heart as ever beat. John could not help a tiny jealous pang as he made the comparison in his mind between George and himself; but he would have to face worse jealousy some day perhaps, and the discipline would be wholesome.

"Why couldn't you go out with me this afternoon?" He tried to say it easily.

"I'd be glad to," was George's laconic answer, which showed little of the delight he really felt at the idea. His curiosity on the subject was as keen, at the very least, as either John Patterson's or Hannah's, and he hailed with relish the opportunity of satisfying it at once.

On the way out that afternoon he told John that he had thought of just the thing for the vacation outing. "Fred Branson spoke to me last month about his cottage at Beach Haven—way up at the north end, you know—and I knew my family wouldn't like it there: it's too quiet. But it occurred to me, after I was talking to you this morning, and I dropped in to see him. It's rather simple and bare, I believe, and it hasn't been rented. He says if you would take it for a few weeks he'd let you have it for a song."

John's eyes brightened and his color rose, but he said nothing at once; a castle in the air was evidently in the course of hurried construction. "I wonder if

Mrs. Wharton would come down and matronize the establishment?" he said at last.

"Mrs. Wharton would break a whole list of engagements to do you a good turn," was George's warm comment; then, as though a thought had just struck him: "I suppose you wouldn't want to take Mary up to North East?"

"Oh, no," John answered emphatically. "It is too far off for this business of Dick's estate, and too gay for her now. Mary wouldn't be fitted out for any such place, either, I think, and besides"—he hesitated—"I am not at all sure that my mother would enjoy having her."

"Or *vice versa*," was George's mental comment.

"Mrs. Wharton would like her, I know," John remarked with unconscious significance.

CHAPTER XI

THE TEST SUCCEEDS

AS they started up the well-worn path toward the cottage, John unconsciously put his companion's walking abilities to a pretty severe test, though John Patterson's predicted shower had cooled the air. His feverish heart again slipped the leash of his judgment, and beat as the hearts of those must have beaten who were about to consult an oracle on a vital issue. John's oracle was to speak in no equivocal terms, however, and the suspense was not to be long.

He had distanced George, to the latter's amusement, by at least a hundred yards, when he came in view of the white figure on the cottage steps. She sprang up, and in a moment was through the gate and coming quickly along the path to meet him. Meantime a comico-tragic exclamation from George had made John halt and look back, and before Mary reached him she saw that he was not alone, and checked her steps, with her eyes on the stranger. John's own never left her face while he took her hand and went through the commonplace form of presentation. He felt like a "Peeping Tom" to so mercilessly sound the deeps that were reflected in her transparent face; the more so that she never even noticed his scrutiny.

She was looking at George with the naïve admiration of a child, but answered his greeting with a dignified shyness that was new to John. The sudden lowering of the lids under George's equally frank gaze, and the softly fluctuating color told plainly of that self-consciousness which is the token of awakening womanhood. She had never showed anything of this to *him*, and yet he told himself with the nearest approach to bitterness he had ever harbored, that he was only *four years* older than George! The tumultuous beating of his heart gave place to a quiet that was like an aching emptiness, a lassitude that reached to the very palms of his hands.

The two were too much taken up with each other to pay any heed to him as they all seated themselves on the low steps which till now Mary had shared only with him. He was not looking at her, and did not even hear what they were saying as he sat, bent forward, prodding the ground with a stick. Suddenly he heard George say: "Won't you show them to me?" and her ready assent, as she went in search, no doubt, of the precious sketches.

An eloquent "Gee whiz, John!" followed her exit.

John turned and answered by a smile bright enough, almost, to deceive the friend who was clever only where his affections were involved.

"Mary, George can give you lots of points. He is a real artist, you know, as well as an architect," he said as she came back carrying an improvised portfolio. His words were quietly matter-of-fact, and his eyes had a steady gentleness as he turned them toward her but something in them recalled the

day before, and her lips trembled. Quick as thought she was by his side, and had deliberately drawn his arm around her and pressed close to him. The action told clearly what she would not put into words. George felt a mist come before his eyes, and he did not look at John. Was it possible! Poor old John! Yet, why poor?

"You don't care to swap horses crossing a stream," he said genially. It was not a question.

She smiled a very sweet little smile as she busied herself with the portfolio on her lap. The stirring of her deepest feeling had destroyed even her unconscious consciousness, but she seemed to feel words unnecessary.

"I don't know anybody who would be willing to swap *your* horse," George went on, looking straight into her eyes as she raised them again, his face soft with affectionate approval: "Once we have John on our side, nothing else counts."

"George!" John remonstrated with heightened color. His lips actually trembled, but whether at George's words or because of the bright head that leaned back against him, his loyal friend forbore to ask himself.

"It is true," was Mary's grave rejoinder.

George leaned forward and held out his hand to her: "Mary, we ought to be good friends, we have such a bond—I beg your pardon, Miss Farnham, but I feel as though I knew you well and you are so different from other girls!"

"I like you to call me Mary because you are John's best friend"—she stopped suddenly, and her chin

quivered with a memory that made her eyes darken marvelously. The arm around her grew eloquent. George only said a simple "Thank you," and they fell to examining the sketches. It was not till later that he remembered the "John," and then it seemed just what he would have expected her to say.

Catharine's appearance at the door just then effected a diversion, and John soon rose and withdrew with her into the little parlor, leaving the two to cement their friendship. He loved that parlor already, and he had an unconscious habit of studying its photographs and souvenirs as though, through them, he were trying to get more in touch with all Mary's past life. He had many times lifted the Bernese doll off the mantel-shelf and half caressed it, never dreaming what a strange picture he made. He did not realize that it was in his hands now, as he laid his plan before Catharine, and asked her coöperation.

"Mr. Brown," she said gravely, "if the lady ye are thinking of could go with ye you wouldn't be needin' me; and if she couldn't—" She hesitated, her eyes on the doll; but John did not help her out. "Of course you know better than me that it wouldn't look just right for ye to have Mary with ye with only a maid, like. She's gettin' to look most a woman, for all she's such a child in her actions." Then, seeing John about to interrupt her, she went on quickly: "I know you always treat me as if I was a lady, and I believe ye feel the same to everybody if ye respect them. Mr. Farnham was that way; but the people ye'd be meeting down at the sea would likely be different and think different."

John stood apparently in serious consultation with the little Bernese; then he raised his head and looked at Catharine very gravely and gently. He did not contradict her.

"But I am sure I can get Mrs. Wharton to go, and we certainly *shall* need you. I couldn't think of taking Mary away from you!"

"Mary's very fond of me, and there would be odd times when she would miss me, perhaps; but"—she went on without bitterness, rather as though the wonder was always fresh in her, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth spoke—"she doesn't even seem to miss her father when you are here! I doubt she'd think of anything else if she had ye with her all the time."

She saw a dark flush mount to John's forehead, and the doll suffered in his powerful hands. "I can hardly believe that," he said huskily.

"You'll forgive me if I'm takin' a liberty to say so, but it's a wonderful power the Lord has given ye over people, Mr. Brown. I've often wondered what would become of the child if Mr. Farnham was taken, for it wasn't only the feelin' a loving child has for a father; he used to know how to *interest* and amuse her so ye could hardly get her away from him long enough for her health; and since I left 'em, she has often written me about the things they were doing together, and studyin' together—and now—it isn't that she forgets, for she's always talkin' about old times, and she has a good many cryin' spells when you are away, but——"

"But she is very young and perfectly healthy,"

John broke in somewhat unsteadily. "We older people"—he said it bravely—"find it harder to react."

Catharine made a faint protest against John's classing himself with her as to age, but it was only a faint one. In reality she felt him entirely middle-aged. They discussed the question of her leaving her garden and premises for long, and finally compromised on her going with them for two weeks, and Mary returning to her in four or five. John explained it all to Mary and suggested wiring Mrs. Wharton that they would both take lunch with her next day if convenient.

"It will give you a chance to get acquainted and you will be sure to like each other," he said, watching Mary's dubious face with some suspense.

George strolled to the garden, leaving the trio deep in consultation, and by the time he got back everything seemed satisfactorily arranged. John and he were both silent for half the distance to the station.

"Well?" John said at last, glancing at his friend's thoughtful face.

"John, it would be simple cruelty to try to coop her up!" was the impetuous answer: "I can't even imagine her in a girl's boarding-school! Will she ever be happy there?" He was sorry for the thoughtless words when he saw the look on John's face.

"I hope so," he answered dully, "but what can I do?"

"Nothing, of course." George's thoughts were flying to Mrs. Brown. "And, no doubt, she will get on finely; but it seems like taking a fawn out of the

woods, or a skylark off the moors, and penning them in a barn-yard with cows and chickens. I declare, I never felt so as if I could write poetry in my life!"

John turned upon him a very bright face and very oblique lips. Then he said half sadly: "But the world is full of cows and chickens!"

"I can't tell you how she impresses me," George went on, disregarding the comment. "It isn't her looks nor her cleverness—I suppose she *is* clever?—it is a kind of indefinable untamedness and unconsciousness about her. I couldn't help wondering whether it came from being brought up among the snow-mountains. She would look at home coming down off the Alps, with the wind blowing her; or rowing a lifeboat, like the pictures of Grace Darling."

John suddenly put his arm across his friend's shoulders: "She has been brought up beside an invalid's chair," he said quietly.

"He must have been an extraordinary invalid!" was George's heart-felt rejoinder. He had never known Dick Farnham well, except through John. "He knew what he was doing when he left her in your care, old man; she isn't *like* you, but she fits to you like a cup to a saucer."

The arm was suddenly withdrawn and John walked a few paces ahead. They were close to the station now and the train was in sight. George did not see his face till they were seated in the car.

"I suppose Miss Newlin will let you go to see her as often as you like?"

"Hardly!" was the dry retort.

George's eyes fell. He saw the hand on John's

knee close. He loved John's hands; they were so character-revealing in their power, dexterity, gentleness. Nothing further was said on the short journey.

"It is the sea her eyes remind me of, the deep sea, with cloud-shadows flying across it," George said to himself as he walked back to the club. He said it with the complete satisfaction of one who has finally grasped an elusive title or tune; then he added with apparent irrelevance, "and he can't run away from it now!"

Once, years ago, he had said quite seriously: "John, if you ever fell in love—!" The hiatus was more expressive than words.

"I know it well enough," John had replied with equal gravity; "and I don't mean to take any risks."

CHAPTER XII

WHICH SHOWS THAT A STORK CAN MAKE A MISTAKE

MRS. WHARTON sat on the piazza of her country home with an open letter on her lap and an expression of soft amusement on her face that was almost, but not quite, a smile.

"Poor Jane!" she said aloud; for like many solitary people, she sometimes forgot and thought aloud. "She is not far wrong." The letter was a long one, written in the close, fine, Spencerian hand so common in the first half of the last century, so rare to-day. The envelope, which had fallen on the board floor, bore the postmark, "Northeast Harbor, Me., July 6, 188—"the last figure was illegible.

Mrs. Wharton spoke no more, but we are privileged to read thoughts, or even to peep over shoulders. The plaintive chronicle of a mother's trials began with some local details, and news of mutual friends, but soon centered on the question that was uppermost in the lady's mind. The top of the open page commenced pathetically:

I had made up my mind to do without him this summer, and I don't mean to be selfish; but it would be a very different thing to feel him on the other side of the ocean, from knowing him roasting there in the city, and spending his whole time looking after that girl. No doubt he lets her feel that she has an absolute

claim on him (you know John); but from his letters, even when he doesn't mention being out at Fernwood, he never mentions being anywhere else. There is never a word about cricket or tennis, or any of the things that used to take up so much of his leisure time, nor a mention of any man except George. His letters are generally short and there is something unnatural about them. I wish someone could prevail upon him to come up here for August. I don't like to say anything more, but I am sure he could be spared by that time. Now that you are home, won't you ask him out for a night and talk to him, and let me know how the land lies? I have a feeling that it is not only a matter of duty—of fulfilling his trust to Dick Farnham—but that he has let himself get so wrapped up in the child that he doesn't want to leave. And she isn't really a child any longer, as I wrote you. You know what we were at sixteen. You were half engaged to Jim Wharton, and I was dreaming and moping over poor James Carey. (What a life I would have had if I'd ever married him!) I can't help worrying a little over John. He's so unused to women! And to have one literally thrown at him this way, and a pretty one! He confessed to me, himself, when I asked him point-blank, that she was more beautiful than her mother; and I can't forget the way he looked when he said it.

It was on this part of the letter that Mrs. Wharton's mind was dwelling as her eyes rested on the glory of the western sky, where the setting sun had only just disappeared. The remains of a light supper were on a little damask-covered table beside her, for her enjoyment of out-of-doors was so great that most of her meals were taken on one or other of the verandas flanking the old house. A generous margin had been added to their original eight feet of width, and an awning on the south one made it seem still more spacious. The rooms inside were very homely, comfortable ones; but Mrs. Wharton was rarely to be found in them in the daytime; and, when she

had a companion, her evenings, too, were generally spent outside.

She sat gazing at the heavens till the vivid rose color changed to violet and then faded to the soft neutral tints of evening, while the moon began to throw shadows on the smooth lawn in front of her. "It will be clear to-morrow and hot," she said, again thinking aloud.

The maid came to remove the little supper table. Then her ample bosom heaved with a deep sigh and she rose and moved over to a bed of sweet-scented flowers close by the piazza. She always planted that one with heliotrope, mignonette, rose geraniums, lemon verbenas and whatever contributed to scent the evening air. They were silent companions whose sweetness was almost like an actual beloved personality to her. She stooped and pulled a sprig of the verbenas, rubbing its leaves between her fingers and inhaling its aromatic perfume. Her hands were large, with knotted, swollen joints, that bore witness to an enemy always lurking near. She was so used to his assaults that she refused to notice them or be guided by the many friendly recommendations and warnings offered her. She sat in the open air of evenings just as she had always done, and ate her strawberries and salads with unruffled enjoyment. For if the truth must out, she was a very self-willed person, with strong, emphatic likes and dislikes, and there was nobody to whose opinion she felt called upon to conform since her husband had died a few years before. To him she had given the absolute allegiance of a life-long affection; for had he not,

as Mrs. Brown had just reminded her, made his first timid avowals as he carried her books home from school? She had been almost grateful to him for that steady, unswerving homage paid to her when, as she knew, any of the *pretty* girls would have received his attention with alacrity. She had never been anything approaching pretty. She would have been positively masculine in appearance with her tall, powerful figure, strong features and high cheek-bones, except for a something expressive of a possibility of tenderness as well as indignation in her large mouth, with its thick lips and strong big teeth; except for an exceedingly genial and even gentle expression in the deep-set twinkling brown eyes with their strong black brows and short thick lashes.

She was as different as possible from Mrs. Brown, whom, however, she had sincerely loved for fifty years, or since they were first old enough to play together with their beloved dolls. The motherly instinct so strongly exhibited in the child of three or four, and so early called into play for real babies, had been bitterly thwarted later on when, one after another, she had seen her children fade away from her before reaching manhood or womanhood. That she, who, except for the aforesaid gout, had scarcely known an illness in her life, should have brought into the world only delicate children whom all her devoted care could not avail to make robust, while Jane Brown, who, in spite of a good physique, was continually ailing, should have been blessed with two children, "*kerngesund*," as our German cousins so happily express it, was a great mystery to her; for she was

a firm believer in heredity and very proud of her genealogy.

"I am sure the stork made a mistake in the number when he brought you John!" she had once said to Mrs. Brown, when John was causing his mother positive dismay by his extraordinary length and strength and awkwardness, and when his ugly features were at their most prominent. "I was always sure he was meant for me and was left at the wrong door,"—for they had been near neighbors for many years of their young married life.

Mrs. Brown had smiled, though her sense of humor was never of the keenest. "I'm afraid he's going to be bigger than his father," she had said, anxiously.

If the stork had been more accurate, it is to be doubted whether Mrs. Wharton's heart, which is a big one, could have been capable of any stronger sentiment for John Wharton than it had always held for John Brown. George Raymond had been quite within bounds when he had said that she would break a whole string of engagements to do John a good turn. What is more, unselfish, thoughtful John was always ready to accept a sacrifice from this good friend with whom he joyfully turned the tables. He counted on her confidently now, and was not to be disappointed. As she moved along to another flower-border, regardless of the gathering evening dew and her trailing skirts, she was startled by the sound of a quick step on the brick path and moved around to the front of the house to meet a messenger from the station bearing one of those yellow envelopes that have caused so many heart flutterings. Mrs.

Wharton's heart did not flutter easily, but she was conscious of a certain anxiety as she carried the telegram in to the light, bidding the messenger wait.

The student-lamp on the round table in the sitting-room had just been lighted. She put on her glasses and spread the paper under it. In a moment her face was transformed by a brighter glow than the lamp had ever caused. "Speak of angels," she said excitedly, going with her quick, heavy step to a desk near by and drawing a telegraph blank from a pigeon-hole. It was a short but exceedingly cordial message that she gave the waiting boy; then she crossed the hall to the dining-room and opened the door of the big inner kitchen.

"Sarah!" she called, "are there any more of those late pie-cherries?" And there followed one of those weighty councils typical of old-fashioned Quaker households where good cheer is a never-failing accompaniment to hospitality.

* * * * *

She was on the platform next day when the train pulled up to the little country station, and the flush on her cheeks was not entirely caused by the ardent rays of the noon-day sun.

"Well, well, to think of your coming out in this broiling heat to meet us!" John said, kissing her with a beaming face. "Mary"—he turned to the girl who, with wide, grave, eyes, was "taking Mrs. Wharton in" with all her might—"you two hardly need an introduction."

The smile that stole over Mary's face was not in the least like the usual one that courtesy dictates

on such occasions. It was the spontaneous yielding to the impression that Mrs. Wharton's smile of welcome made upon her, and Mrs. Wharton read it correctly, and much beside, of which it was a symbol. She took the girl's hand in both her misshapen ones, and then suddenly stooped and kissed her warmly. "I am very glad to see you, dear," was all she said aloud; but it was with difficulty she restrained herself from giving way to her habit and making audible the rest of her thought.

They were soon seated in the roomy carriage which stood waiting a little way off under a tree—Mrs. Wharton was more merciful to her beasts than to herself—and then, as John opened conversation with his old friend Sam on the front seat, she turned again and let her eyes rest on the flushed face beside her. Mary had, at John's request, put on one of the simple white dresses, but the blue ribbons were replaced by black velvet and the gold beads by a curious dull gold locket on a velvet band. The buckle that clasped the girdle was of heavy Roman gold, and both ornaments, which were too old for a child, gave her a more mature young-womanly air than usual. The round hat, which John had lately bought her, because, as he explained with some diffidence, it looked so like her he couldn't help it, had surprised though it had not balked him by its price, for its simple white straw was decorated only with a black velvet bow and two clusters of opening moss-rose-buds, so natural that one felt sure they must smell. He had seen his taste endorsed by so many pairs of eyes on that morning's trip that

he had half wished he had added a veil to its trimmings.

"Mary, I've wanted all these weeks to see you, but I've been away for a month and I should have hesitated about intruding on you anyhow." Mrs. Wharton took one of the white-cotton-gloved hands in hers and pressed it hard. Expressions of sympathy did not come readily with her, but Mary understood. John was not surprised when he turned around a few minutes later to see the white glove in custody and an expression on both faces that betokened the plighting of friendship's troth.

"I knew they would soon hit it off," he said to himself, while his eyes met Mrs. Wharton's with grateful ardor and a mute appeal.

Her answering look promised: "To the bitter end!" and some touch of solicitude in it foreboded the possible "bitter."

They rumbled over the arched stone bridge that crossed a wide, quiet stream, passed a screen of woods, and turned into the shady driveway that approached the old house. Its field-stone walls, so characteristic of Pennsylvania country houses, had been plastered and whitewashed on both gable ends, when or why Mrs. Wharton herself had no idea, but they formed a very attractive background for the ivy and rose-bushes trained upon them.

The hall door stood hospitably open, and the eye, piercing the shady length of the cool entry, was carried on through the opposite doorway to the orchard beyond.

"What a dear old house!" was Mary's heartfelt

exclamation as she sprang out, hardly touching John's offered hand, and stood looking delightedly about her.

"I call this my second home," John said, pleased with her pleasure. "I have had the happiest times of my life in this old place, and your father used to come here too when he was a boy."

"I hope you will get to feel it like home and let John bring you here often," Mrs. Wharton said heartily as she took her guest upstairs.

The curious old furniture came in for a fresh burst of Mary's enthusiasm. And she ran her hand caressingly over the smooth mahogany of the big chairs and gazed in wonderment at the gigantic four-poster, which Mrs. Wharton said was the only thing not inherited from generations long past. "That is the one piece I ever bought, and it didn't come from a shop. I bought it in New Orleans from an old Creole lady, because it was so enormous. I was determined to have one bed in this house big enough for John to luxuriate in, for he must have a hard time most places he goes. He was only sixteen when I got it, but as tall as he is now. It is a real inconvenience to be bigger than other people and have to always try to fit into ordinary niches and sit on ordinary, flimsy chairs. I happen to have inherited some chairs big enough even for John."

"But I wouldn't for the world have him like other people, would you? I love his bigness so. He seems so big inside, he would burst a *little* body!"

The big body in question was leaning against a pillar on the shady back piazza, his eyes on the rich

green of the orchard, which looked like spring again since the harvesting of its first hay crop. It is doubtful whether it occupied all his thoughts, however, for his ear heard the steps on the stair, and his expectant eyes were on the door as the two came out to him.

Mary's right hand slipped at once into his left one and she said in an undertone, "Ask her now, John."

Mrs. Wharton did not catch her words, but she saw the subtle reflection of her touch in John's face independently of the smile with which he looked down at her. Indeed, it struck the observer that the smile came in spite of the other deeper feeling.

"Where are you going?" he asked, retaining her hand as she was about to move quickly past him.

"Just to look around," she said, with a little, sly smile.

"Aren't you going to back me up?" he asked; but suddenly bethinking himself, he loosed the hand, and she went lightly around the corner to the front of the house.

Mrs. Wharton's rather startled expression made him laugh outright, and then he soberly told his little story and made his request.

"I could not think of asking this sort of sacrifice of anyone but you—or George—" he said in conclusion; "not even of mother. She would love to do anything for me, I know, but—" Mrs. Wharton understood the "but."

"Poor Jane!" she said aloud. Then, seeing John's face sadden, she added quickly: "You are right in

regard to this. It would not do; only I feel as though in accepting your invitation, I was depriving her of something precious that she ought to have."

"Mother gave me up to Dick this summer," John said, in a low, pained voice; "and I promised him my time should be Mary's. I have no choice or I might feel it my duty. It is not unnatural that mother should think—Mrs. Wharton, I am sure she would not understand Mary, and I am afraid she will not like her." He tried in vain to steady his voice and the trembling of his lips. Mrs. Wharton met his wistful, direct gaze with one equally direct. John felt he was answered.

They soon fell into the discussion of such prosaic things as bed- and table-linen, and other domestic details with which Mrs. Wharton insisted on burdening herself.

"I think John Patterson and Hannah can attend to all our needs," John said; "but there is Mary—I will call her."

CHAPTER XIII

"THE DEEPEST DEPTHS OF A FULL HEART"

"O H, how lovely!" The direct object of Mrs. Wharton's delighted exclamation was a low stone-ware butter-crock filled with freshly gathered wild roses, to which Mary was adding the finishing touches on the breakfast table; but following the direction of John's eyes, one would have applied the adjective to another noun. Perhaps Mrs. Wharton intended to include both. It was the first Sunday of their Beach Haven stay, and the first really "settled" day; for Saturday had been full of commotion and arrangement. Mary had been everywhere, up stairs and down, as pleased as a child with a play house, and every face reflected her interest and pleasure. One main object of her search had been "nice" receptacles for flowers, for she had scornfully spurned the slim, toppling or over-decorated ornaments scatteringly disposed about the bare rooms.

Opening the kitchen door to discover her whereabouts, John had met her returning from a rear shed with a glowing face and news of treasure trove in the way of more or less dilapidated stone and earthenware vessels. She carried a specimen under each arm. That they had been discarded for lack

of lids, handles or noses was no detriment, in her eyes, and indeed lids must have been dispensed with in any case.

John and Hannah felt as though the whole arrangement were a sort of continuous picnic, at which they were all drinking from the fountain of youth. Already they were Mary's intimate friends and on terms of respectful mutual understanding with Catharine, who at once joined forces with them as a matter of course, quietly but conclusively negating any other plan.

"Why, you must have been up since dawn," Mrs. Wharton continued, looking around at two jugs of daisies, a little brown pitcher of sea-pinks and grasses and a bunch of glorified clover blossoms in a tumbler. The unkempt yard of the cottage, with its hillocky, sandy soil, furnished no more aristocratic blossoms, unless the morning-glories on the porch might lay claim to that distinction; and the handful of pinks had been gathered by the grocer's boy and dumbly offered at Mary's shrine.

John's toilet had been hindered by his appreciation of the picture that had appeared and disappeared within his range of vision, and the prospect of coming down morning after morning to find her there beside him at breakfast, of having her beside him all day long, on the beach, in the surf, along the few roads that all merged into that long causeway out to the boat-wharves, shopping for household things at the store as she had done yesterday morning, or begging her turn at steering the boat under Captain Smith's guidance, as in the afternoon, filled him with a flood

of ungovernable joy. He was to crowd a week of ordinary happiness into each day.

Dick was ever present to him in Mary, but with little pain. The loss which would have so heavily clouded his summer was merged in the great gain that loss had brought, and in the feeling that Dick himself had foreseen this and arranged for it as far as he could.

"I know nearly everything that ever happened to you when you were a little boy," Mary had said to him lately. "Father told me everything about you. I suppose he knew I was going to belong to you some day." She could not guess what a galvanic thrill had shot through John at the matter-of-fact statement.

"It didn't take me very long to pick these," was her pleased answer to Mrs. Wharton's words. "Catharine says the only way to keep wild roses from fading right away is to pick them before the sun has been on them long, and get them into water as quickly as you can."

"John, don't you want to go to church?" she asked gravely, when they were seated at breakfast. "Father said you always went, and I know you have been staying away all summer because of me."

John hesitated. He had always known that he and Dick differed in their religious beliefs, but it had made no difference to their close friendship. Each had thoroughly respected the other's point of view without definitely knowing it, and Dick made it a point of honor never to try to influence his more orthodox friend. But he had confessed to having

made Mary "a little theologian," and John dreaded any word or act that might open the least gulf between himself and her. Somehow differing with her was another thing than differing with Dick. She was so young and so positive. She would not understand any point of view but her father's, and would perhaps feel him narrow and find his church-going Sunday irksome. He meant to be true to himself and he knew that he was a coward; but he could not bring himself to hurry matters. He looked up at her now with heightened color and a rather formal gravity.

"I do generally go to church, but I am not dependent on it, and I should rather do what you would like. Of course, you have not been used to going anywhere?"

"But I want to," Mary said, her eyes filling at the memory of those other Sundays. "I should like to go with you"—a faint accent on the "you." "Are you an Episcopalian too, Mrs. Wharton?" she asked.

"No, dear, I am a Friend."

"Oh, like Grandma!" The pleased inflection of Mary's voice made both her listeners smile.

"Yes," Mrs. Wharton said, "only I belong to the other branch: what they call the 'Hicksite' Friends. Do you know the difference?"

"Yes, Father told me about why the break came, and he said if he had been there he would have sided with the 'Hicksites.' He wouldn't join them later because he said it would hurt Grandma's feelings, and anyhow, a Friend can believe anything he likes, especially if he doesn't say anything in the meetings."

Mrs. Wharton said she thought she should spend the morning reading and writing in her own room, and from its window she watched the setting forth of the other two to the little Episcopal Church. She saw John take the parasol and raise it. His smile did her heart good. "I have never seen his face look like it does now," she said to herself, with a little sigh, and then turned to her desk and "Jane Brown's" unanswered letter. She found it a harder matter to begin than she had thought, judging by the length of time her eyes rested immovably on the fresh sheet before her and the number of times her pen was dipped in the ink, only to dry unused.

"You are more particular to-day," John said, teasingly, to Mary, referring to a reckless exposure of her complexion the afternoon before, over which he had felt obliged to remonstrate.

"I am particular about my roses," she said smilingly. His eyes wandered from hat to cheeks, and plainly asked the question he checked on his lips.

Mary laughed. "I mean *your* roses," she added, a deeper shade in her own accompanying the frank words.

The church was mainly supported by the contributions of summer visitors; and a different clergyman officiated each Sunday. It was a very simple service and the whole congregation joined heartily in responses and hymns. Mary knew few hymns and had not much voice; but her soul seemed lifted up on wings and her eyes filled again and again. She put her handkerchief to them as unobtrusively as possible; yet she knew John noticed, and felt

his sympathy in every decorous conventional little service he tendered her. She knew the words of most of the liturgy, though he had to find the places for her, and she preferred singing with him from his hymn-book, or rather looking on with him while he sang. John always disclaimed the possession of a singing voice, though his speaking voice had great richness and variety in spite of the unmistakable Philadelphia accent. His singing of those hymns that he liked was the unaffected outpouring of his heart, and Mary's was not the only heart that was stirred in response. Once she raised her eyes from the book to his face, as a child looks up with the simple need of showing affection and getting sympathy. The look she encountered gave her a new sense of the sweetness of life—of a world full of noble endeavor, of infinite possibilities, of unbounded love.

The words of the old collect had never fallen on more fertile soil: "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Christ, our Lord."

Her low "Amen" came from the deepest depths of a full heart.

Dick Farnham had early recognized that he was master of a little craft full-rigged for every wind of impulse and emotion on the ocean of life. Should he try to reef her or transform her to some safer, more plodding form of vessel? No! All the sportsman in him loved his racing yacht. Thank God,

she was not meant for shallow water! He would deepen her keel, ballast her as heavily as might be and trust her to the open sea. He had no need to strengthen her love to God; she caught fire in an instant, and he recognized the stuff of which mystics and martyrs are made. He turned his whole training to her reason and judgment. They studied the Bible together in the light of all the sane and reverent criticism he could find suited to her years, and he led her to weigh the true and false at every turn, as they discussed books and sermons. She had seldom been in a church and was unused to music. Her father had never even been able to "turn a tune."

John knew this and thought he read what was taking place in her. She occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of the really excellent sermon; or, rather, he heard it only through her ears, and he saw that they missed no word. Her eyes scarcely left the preacher's face, and her clasped hands, from which she had drawn the gloves, never stirred on her lap. Over and over John chid himself, and tried to follow her example, and over and over his truant thoughts came back. Had Dick foreseen how he too would thrill with the rapture of seeing those white sails spread?

The church was crowded, and they had slipped into seats at the very back, but even there it seemed to John that all eyes would turn to watch the picture at his side. He recognized the owners of some of them, and as the congregation moved out after those last solemn, beautiful words of benediction, he turned to Mary and asked her to wait for him in the

scanty scrap of shade. "I must speak to some of these people," he said ruefully.

When he joined her the flushed, earnest face bore witness to the depth of the impression she had received. He only glanced at it as he took her prayer-book—Dick's old book—and put it in his pocket.

"John," she said in a very low voice, as the whole congregation moved toward the beach in procession, "may I always go to church with you?" Always! The word smote bitter sweet on John's ear. A quick vision of his mother, of Miss Newlin, of a host of shadowy figures out of the unknown future passed before his mental eye. But he turned to her with a smile and said simply, "I knew that you were glad to be there."

"Oh!" He saw her lips tremble as she turned her face away; then her eyes were raised dark and deep as those of a young seer, "I never felt so near to God before!"

He answered her gaze expressively enough, but found no words for the wave of gratified feeling that filled him. They were nearing the crowded beach, where many bathers were already in the surf, and some of the church-goers were hastening to join them. It was a dazzlingly gay scene, and both felt it jar on their earnest mood. Without a word they turned away and walked toward the cottage, in its retired setting, through the scattered groups under the beach umbrellas, the playing children and picturesque bathers apparently more intent on basking in the sun's rays than dipping in the ocean's waves.

By common consent they halted some distance beyond and seated themselves on a sand-hillock at the top of the steep beach.

"John," Mary said earnestly, "I wish I could belong to your church and believe just what you believe, for I do love you so *dearly*!" The warm color and starting tears bore witness to the sincerity of the impulsive words.

John's face quivered and his eyes fell. "Couldn't you?" he said without trying to answer the rest of her confession.

"Can anybody join the Episcopal Church without being baptized?"

"No, but you wouldn't hesitate about that if it were for somebody you were fond of, and surely you would be willing to do it for Christ."

"Oh, no, it isn't that! Of course, I would be willing to *do* almost anything, only I don't really believe Christ wants me to do that; but I would have to say I believed something, you see."

At another time John might have smiled at the childlike words, but not now. "You didn't repeat the Creed this morning," he said. "Was it because you don't understand it, or"—he hesitated—"I am afraid I would be a poor help, as I have my own way of interpreting things, and it isn't a very logical way, perhaps; but I would be willing to try."

"Oh, I think I understand it," Mary said sadly, "but I don't believe it. Perhaps I might believe it your way." The gaze she turned upon him was not a child's gaze. They were such eyes as that other Mary in Bethany of old might have lifted to the

Master at whose feet she sat. A passer-by wondered what could cause such distraction in the oddly assorted pair. Could that beautiful girl possibly be his daughter? And what had happened to them? John had a sudden consciousness of the immense influence it was in his power to exert over this eager, impressionable nature whose love for him was so deeply tinged with hero-worship, and yet he intuitively knew that in the last resort, when reason had overtopped emotion, her influence would be the stronger.

"I should like to try to make you believe as I do," he said rather dully, "but truth is a very big thing, and we none of us grasp it all and few of us get just the same piece. You believe that I am as anxious as your father or you to live by what I hold to be true, don't you?" Her eyes were reassuring.

"I have been very much afraid of touching on these things with you, because I—I hate to differ with you." He tried to smile frankly in her face. "I wouldn't want to make you believe anything that your father didn't believe, and I couldn't make you if I would; you are too exactly like him. You will always do your own judging."

"Well, won't you go over the prayer-book, especially the Creed, with me some time, and tell me how *you* think?"

John's none too eager answer was prevented by a dripping urchin who seemed to be a connoisseur of pictures and to recognize a masterpiece under the green parasol. His unembarrassed gaze put a merry end to their talk.

CHAPTER XIV

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

JOHN'S catechumenical lecture did not take place at once, for there seemed no haste on the part of either to broach a topic that might be fraught with difference of opinion, and chance decreed that it was to be Mary who should give the first teaching. She was very fond of reading, and read aloud delightfully, without self-consciousness or elocutionary effect and with a very intelligent appreciation of her subject and a keen sense of humor. Both Mrs. Wharton and John were astonished at the extent of her general information. John always took his turn at connected reading, and most of their evenings were passed in this way, while Mrs. Wharton plied her indefatigable knitting or crochet needles.

Once they happened upon a Biblical allusion that brought up the question of Higher Criticism, and Mary gave a very simple and clear opinion, gained from her respectable knowledge of this subject. It ended in her bringing out her well-worn Bible and giving a little lecture to a very indulgent audience.

John knew little of Biblical criticism and had been somewhat prejudiced against it by what he considered unwarranted assumptions on the part of German critics whom he had heard quoted. He had been busy

with other matters and disinclined to critical study for its own sake, while any irreverent handling of the sacred and time-honored text was repugnant to his feelings. That Mary's training had been toward reverence he had no doubt, and his mind and heart were open to all she would tell him. Neither he nor Mrs. Wharton had so good a knowledge of the Bible as their youthful teacher, and Mrs. Wharton was ignorant of the rudiments of criticism and hardly knew the meaning of the word exegesis. She had been no Bible student at any time and her devotional reading was confined to the Psalms and Gospels, with short excursions into the Prophets and Epistles. When any passage or chapter puzzled her, she passed it by and went on to what was plain, troubling herself little about Verbal Inspiration, difference of authenticity or chronology or any other of the burning questions of the schools. Her simple faith in the goodness of God, which repeated personal bereavements had not succeeded in shaking, was sufficient for her. She read the acts and teachings of Jesus without any question as to sequence or context, and accepted literally his injunction, "Let not your heart be troubled." She was a woman of very moderate education or culture, but her unassailable position in the solider stratum of Philadelphia society, her intercourse with many people of high culture and attainment and her much traveling among the older civilizations of Europe gave her an assured manner of handling many subjects on which she frankly confessed her ignorance; and her knowledge of the world and of people stood her in as good stead with society

at large as a much more considerable learning. The terms that came so fluently from Mary's lips were "Greek" to her, and it seemed quite unimportant whether the whole Pentateuch had come down the centuries in the undisputed handwriting of Moses himself or had been a composite mass of material of various epochs. She saw it was otherwise with John and that his interest was real. She thought it likely that he would not have undertaken this study from pure love of it; but pure love of the teacher is a great stimulus to learning.

Mrs. Wharton soon dropped out of all active share in the discussions; for they developed into discussions, as John had many pertinent questions to put and doubts to raise, but she was generally present. She was never at any time allowed to feel herself *de trop*, and indeed she never was. They had no wish for *tête-à-têtes*. Mary was happy so long as she was with John, but had generally no desire to be with him alone, and he on his side felt the presence of a sympathetic friend rather a safeguard than otherwise.

Mrs. Wharton was a very sympathetic friend, but after three or four weeks of observation of this other friendship, she found herself growing a trifle impatient and dissatisfied with John. It was unnatural for so mature and sober-minded a man as he to pass one day after another in this uninterrupted absorption in any woman, still less in a mere child. To be sure, there was neither monotony nor lack of activity in their long days together. John taught her to swim and to steer a sail-boat, and she was as enthusiastic a pupil as heart could desire. His great height and strength

enabled him to take her out beyond the surf, which was often heavy on the coast, to where he could hold her waistband with light touch and let her practice her strokes under his critical instruction. Her native fearlessness and entire confidence in her teacher made her a most apt pupil. She would float on her back far beyond her depth without a question, and no rough surf or cold sea seemed sufficient reason for missing a bath. This summer out of doors, after her long years of confinement, gave her, in spite of many sad thoughts, a sort of intoxication bred of sunshine and fresh air; and her constant variety would have made her an interesting companion to a man much less "absorbed" in her than John.

Beach Haven is one of the many unlovely but beloved bathing resorts that speckle the long line of New Jersey's coast from Sandy Hook to Cape May. It lies—and it lies flat—on one of those narrow, treeless strips of sand which form a natural breakwater to half the coast length, separated from the mainland by a long succession of watery thoroughfares, navigable for sail-boats of the "cat-boat" type at high tide, and deepening and broadening occasionally into fine bays. It is on one of these, Little Egg Harbor, that Beach Haven is situated. At the time of which I write, some twenty odd years ago, the old boat that had plied backward and forward for many years between the mainland and the beach had been supplanted by the railway, which, crossing where the bay narrows into the thoroughfare, brought its trainloads of hot and grimy passengers straight into the little town.

The bay forms a perfect sailing ground for boats

of light draught; and a centerboard that can be lifted at will makes it possible to skim over the many sandy flats where a keel would stick fast. Mary's pleasure in this bay and her delight in being allowed to steer gave almost as much enjoyment to the elderly captain as to John himself. Neither of them cared much for fishing. The pulling of fish out of the water for mere sport was a horror to Mary's loving nature and John agreed with her as to the cruelty, only reminding her that their sensibility was not so keen as that of warmer-blooded animals.

"But they jump about as if they felt awfully and they must hate to die," she remonstrated. "I would a great deal rather see them swimming about enjoying themselves."

On an average of once a week John did go to the city for a day's business, and on the eve of one of these absences Mrs. Wharton, who was alone with him, suggested his taking a little longer vacation and paying a visit to George at Cape May.

"Mary and I are good friends, and will be very happy together, even without Catharine, and it will do you good to have a little male companionship for a change."

In spite of the genial tone in which the suggestion was proffered, John easily detected the note of dissatisfaction. His eyes met hers with a steadiness that was disconcerting as he answered quietly: "Mrs. Wharton, I know what you are thinking and perhaps you are right, but I am having what I never had before and never shall have again after this summer, and I would not give up one unnecessary hour of it."

Mrs. Wharton's eyes fell and her heavy nether lip trembled a little. There was silence in the room for a long minute; then she said in a very different tone: "Perhaps you can never have just this again, but I hope there may be still better things in store for you."

He changed color violently and opened his lips to answer, when Mary's voice was heard at the kitchen door. She had been sitting with Catharine, who was to go back to Fernwood next day, and as she came toward them her face was grave and her eyes had a look of having been hastily dried. As John rose, she came to him and took a little chair near by, drawing it still closer and slipping her hand into his as he reseated himself. Not a word was said for a long while. Each heart was occupied with its own feelings. Mrs. Wharton's eyes were lifted from the little sacque she was knitting long enough to add to her memory gallery a picture that moved her strangely.

"What will be the end of it?" she asked herself, fearfully. "Poor Jane! I am a traitor to her, I am afraid. 'He will let her feel she has a claim on him,'" recalling the words of that letter of Mrs. Brown's. "A claim!" Was a claim the word for entire possession? Mary's hand went into his as though it belonged there; or, rather, every feeling of need in her seemed to turn to him to be made good with a wordless security that was absolute. "She will take all she wants from him, and then perhaps want something else from younger men," she thought, with some bitterness. She had remarked that Mary was not blind to the glances of the gilded youth who would probably be willing to supply her needs if appealed to. A

deep, unconscious sigh escaped her, which was twin sister to thinking aloud, but in a language intelligible to only one of her listeners. His handclasp tightened and he took no heed of the half-amused glance Mary shot at him from the corner of her eye. His own were bent on the ground.

"If I were a sculptor I would do your hand, John," she said after a long pause. He started and colored. His grasp relaxed and he looked in rueful astonishment at her reddened fingers and mutely asked her pardon.

"Aren't his hands beautiful, Mrs. Wharton? They are the hands of a really, truly, no-mistake gentleman."

"Why, Mary!" John laughed and colored like a bashful, gratified school-boy.

She spread his hand out on the arm of his chair, adjusting his passive fingers and making him pose.

"It is a very good-looking hand, Mary," Mrs. Wharton assented as though just aroused to notice of it, "and better than a gentleman's, because it looks so much stronger than most gentlemen's."

"Oh, but I mean a *real* gentleman who's strong too," was the quick rejoinder. "Now!" removing her own hands to survey her model, her head a little on one side, "Look at that! But I don't like statues of hands by themselves."

"And the rest of me would make a queer statue," John said, laughing. She surveyed him with a critical, teasing eye, which immediately softened and grew bright with a sudden thought. "Oh, John, won't you go to-morrow and have your picture taken—the whole of you, every bit, sitting like that? A big one," making the proportions with her hands, "for me to

take to school with me when I go." Her eyes suddenly darkened dangerously and the shadow on her face was reflected on John's, though he smiled bravely. He did not answer for a moment.

"Please, John! Won't you? It would make *such* a difference!"

Could he possibly refuse such a wish, so expressed, Mrs. Wharton wondered. She committed the fault, rare with her, of dropping two or three stitches on the sleeve of the sacque she was knitting, to which, however, she seemed to give the most absorbed attention. The interest she felt in the little drama enacted before her became intense and not unmingled with embarrassment. Didn't she know, and didn't John know that she knew, that for twenty years his mother's one valid cause of dissatisfaction with him had been his obstinate, albeit good-humored, refusal to have himself photographed. What if he should weaken now! There was no doubt that Mary was in earnest and her allusion to the time of their separation was an unconscious master-stroke. Of course, she knew nothing of his previous attitude on this question.

He glanced at Mrs. Wharton's guilty face, and his own color rose. He did not look at Mary, while he made a semi-comic excuse which still had the final sound of a refusal of her request. Mrs. Wharton made sure that she would coax him further, but she did not. She only looked at him in mournful surprise. She saw he had some special feeling about it and forbore annoying him. Could he be too vain! They were all silent for a time; then John changed the subject by asking her to take her bath next day down the beach,

where the life-boat was and the crowd made it safe. "There are holes in some places and a good deal of undertow," he said. She assented very quietly. (Mrs. Wharton had promised to bathe with her.) Then she suddenly rose, saying she had forgotten something she wanted to tell Catharine, and went back to the kitchen.

Silence followed her exit. Mrs. Wharton hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry that John had refused the apparently simple request. His granting it would certainly offend and hurt his mother, but on the other hand— "How could he refuse her?" she wondered again, while her active needles put material beyond those dropped stitches that would all have to be pulled out next morning.

John got up, saying he must look for some papers, and the social part of the evening was at an end.

She went with Mary to the little station next morning to see the travelers off on the early train, and was particularly tender in her manner to the downcast girl as they returned to the cottage.

Mary, as she walked to the bath in her simple blue suit, was to Mrs. Wharton's mind as lovely a picture as eye could wish, always excepting Mary returning from the bath. Then the rubber cap was off, and the sun could play in the golden brown waves which, for convenience's sake, were massed on top of her head, giving her a more than usually grown-up air, while the wet mohair clung to her nymph-like figure, revealing all its elasticity and grace. The sun had kissed cheeks and nose, sprinkling them with tiny freckles, which the rich glow of exercise and health hid from any

but close observers. Mrs. Wharton, who was far from nymph-like in figure, and usually longed to scurry from her bath by the shortest and least frequented paths, felt safe from observation as she walked by this vision of girlhood on whom all eyes turned. "Why isn't she ruined?" she asked herself. Then as she saw two men approaching, she felt an unselfish wish to intrude her bulk into the foreground between them and Mary, who was stooping as she walked and wringing the water from her short skirt, quite unconscious of any eyes upon her. Mrs. Wharton's maneuver was promptly outwitted by the men, who turned toward the sea, cutting diagonally across Mary's path. They were not in bathing clothes, but in the morning garb of exquisites *à l'Anglais*. The younger, a strikingly thoroughbred, well "set-up" figure, with clear-cut features and brilliant gray-blue eyes, turned them on Mary with an expression that Mrs. Wharton could not read. It almost seemed to her that his lips trembled, and there was nothing offensive in his steady regard, as there was in the bold gaze of his comrade, whose face, originally good-looking, perhaps, had been puffed and reddened by frequent potations, and whose pale eyes held an insult in their bold stare. Neither of them so much as glanced at Mrs. Wharton, who involuntarily drew back.

As they passed directly in front of Mary, she straightened herself and looked at them with the startled, unconscious dignity of pure-hearted girlhood, coloring deeply under the double gaze so close to her, but showing not a trace of the coquetry with which girls sometimes receive homage of that sort.

"By Jove, what a beauty!" the older man exclaimed, before they were ten paces away.

"Shut up!" was his companion's exceedingly irritated answer in a much lower key, but still distinctly audible. "She heard you!"

"Well, you can bet it's no news to her," was the older man's coarse retort, as he turned and looked after the quickly retreating figures.

Mrs. Wharton glanced at the bright cheek nearest her, but it was shaded by dark, drooping lashes.

"If we have to bathe over there often, I shall rent a couple of the Engleside bath-houses," she said, finally, in a very emphatic voice.

Mary looked up quickly, but made no reply, and they soon reached their own very primitive dressing rooms in the cottage basement.

"Mrs. Wharton," Mary asked her, when they were sitting on the shady side of the piazza a half hour later, awaiting the luncheon summons, "do you think being beautiful will ever make me disagreeable?"

The odd question brought a very tender smile to Mrs. Wharton's plain, strong face. She looked deep into her questioner's honest eyes, and her little brown ones were suffused. "No, dear child," she said with conviction and relief in her voice. "It never could!"

"Father said once that he would have been better pleased if I had been ugly, or at least plain, because then I would always have known the people who really cared for me. He said he would rather I were loved than admired, especially if it were just for looks. Last year he told me about my mother." Her chin quivered. "I suppose everybody knows about her,

but I never spoke about it to anybody but John and Catharine."

Mrs. Wharton looked at her compassionately. "I suppose your father thought you might hear from outside sources some day, and he wanted to prepare you," she said gently.

"Perhaps," Mary assented, "but he said he wanted me to see how little happiness it brought to be just beautiful. He said he fell in love with Mother because she was beautiful, and that perhaps men would fall in love with me for the same reason!" Mrs. Wharton could not forbear a slight smile. "But unless it were love for my real self, and unless I were true and unselfish, they wouldn't keep on loving me. He said married people were never happy together unless they were good friends and understood each other's ways. He said some day I would love somebody so much I would want to *die* for him (she colored and quivered as though she were capable now of understanding that), and I wouldn't care whether he were good or bad; but he made me write down and keep it always by me, so I couldn't forget, that I promised him (I mean Father) that I would never marry anybody without John's consent, no matter how unhappy it made me not to. He said John would know and would never let anything but real reasons count against a man. So I promised, and I wrote it down and keep it in my treasure box."

She was very grave and her eyes were dark with the solemn memory. "Father knew I would never break a promise," she said proudly, "no matter how I felt." Mrs. Wharton was silent before this revelation.

What an extraordinary training hers had been with the father who had tried to prepare her for life at all its vital points; and what unbounded trust Dick Farnham had had in John! But the responsibility for John of such a power of veto, under the circumstances! She shivered.

"If only I could live with John like this always, I don't think I'd ever want to get married—only—" She stopped and colored again. The speech she had asked Catharine not to repeat recurred to her mind, and the feeling that had prompted it.

"I should like to keep you always with me," Mrs. Wharton said, with an impulse unusual to her unemotional nature. "You must come to me for all your vacations when you haven't something more attractive to do. Will you?"

"Why, Mrs. Wharton," Mary exclaimed, rising and throwing her arms about the lady's neck, "and John too?"

Mrs. Wharton laughed outright as she warmly kissed the girl on both cheeks. "I can't get John when I want him," she said, a little wistfully. "His mother comes first, you know. He is devoted to her and is never away from her as he has been this summer."

Mary became very grave and resumed her low rocking-chair without a word.

"Poor child!" Mrs. Wharton said to herself. "I wonder if Jane will ever ask her there or how she will treat her if she does." Her first question was answered that evening when John, who arrived by the afternoon train, opened the mail it had brought with him.

"Mary," he said, turning to her with a smile and

a mixture of eagerness and hesitation, "my mother wants to know whether you will spend the week before you go to Miss Newlin, with us in the city?"

He had been in great spirits since his return, and looked distinctly excited at this idea. "Would you like to come?" he asked.

Mary gave him a look both surprised and reproachful. "Of course," she said simply. Then seeing something in his face that she did not understand, she added, "I hope your mother will like me, John." John winced and came as near prevarication as he ever could.

"Why did you ask that? Doesn't everybody like you?" He felt a strong curiosity to know what had caused this unwonted misgiving.

"Only Mrs. Wharton said once that Mrs. Brown wasn't a bit like her, nor like you," she paused, seeing a pained look cross John's face; "and if you love her more than anybody, it would make ever so much difference to me." John understood the somewhat lamely expressed thought. "I think she can't help liking you," he said, trying to make his smile as reassuring as he wished, but not perfectly succeeding.

"Perhaps she won't want you to come out to Fernwood every day? She gets home on the first, too?" The question was a very wistful one. Some unusual premonition was troubling her mind. John's face clouded heavily. "I shouldn't feel it right, anyhow; I have been away from her so long," he said with sudden weariness. How near the end seemed!

Mary's head went down on the table with her face turned from him. "Oh, I wish you hadn't let me get

so used to you!" she exclaimed in a broken, vehement voice.

Mrs. Wharton saw a storm of feeling sweep over John's face and his hands clasp the arms of his chair as though to hold himself down. She dropped her eyes to her work. There was a moment's breathless stillness, then he rose and laid his hand on the bent head.

"Don't you think I have got used to you too?" he asked, huskily.

hers with responsive readiness, but there was no spark of recognition in her mind.

"You don't remember Mrs. Wurts and Jack?" the lady said, her admiring eyes on the girl's suddenly brightened face. "But I saw you a day or two ago, and asked who you were. I couldn't find out at first, but when I did, and where you were staying, I made up my mind to go and see you to-day." Her smile suddenly died, and she said in a very gentle voice, glancing at the girl's blue dress with carefully veiled surprise, "I heard from Catharine, whom I met one day on the street, of your great trouble; and since then I hear that your father has been released from his long suffering." She clasped Mary's hand tightly and her eyes filled. "I can't tell you how sad it made me to know of his illness! I have thought of you so often and wished I might meet you, but I only heard of you once and then the man only knew that you were living abroad." Her kind volubility spared Mary the need of any answer, and she went on. "You look just as I should have thought you would. You must be nearly sixteen, for I remember you were two years younger than Jack. Oh, here he comes!" A fresh-faced, wholesome looking lad in white flannels, carrying a striped "blazer," came swinging up the path, and gave his mother no time to go through the formalities of an introduction.

"Well, this *is* jolly!" he exclaimed, taking the hand his mother released, and looking with frankly admiring eyes straight into Mary's blushing face. "Do you still bite?" The *un*blushing effrontery with which his gaze rested on her lips, made the short

upper one rise in a very bright smile, and displayed a formidable array of even white teeth.

"Jack! You outrageous boy!" his mother said, in a really shocked voice; but seeing Mary's easy reception of his impudence, she laughed too. This solemn-looking giant coming toward them, must be the guardian—Dick's great friend, of whom she had just been told. Jack let go Mary's hand as the "solemn-looking giant" reached them (he did look solemn), and she promptly slipped it into John's left one as she introduced him to her newly discovered friends. He greeted them with even more than his usual cordial courtesy; but Mrs. Wurts thought, as she entered into conversation with him, leaving the youngsters free to renew their acquaintance, that it could not be good for Mary to be constantly in the society of so grave a man. It seemed as though it cost him an effort to smile at all, and his eyes—they were good eyes too—were so heavy. She was glad they had come upon Mary in time to give her a little young society and take her out of herself. How bright her face had been when she smiled at Jack a moment ago. No doubt this guardian, Mr. Brown, was a fine man (he made one think of Lincoln), and Mary seemed fond of him; the look on her face, and the fingers slipped into his as she presented him, spoke of affectionate ownership; but he was deadly dull to talk to, and how quickly Mary could chat with Jack. Their voices were low now. They were touching on her troubles. But she was not shy at all, and they would get on famously. Mrs. Wurts decided that Jack would need no encour-

agement to go often to see her. As these thoughts went through her mind, she kept up a string of commonplaces about Beach Haven and her son and her pleasure in meeting Mary. It is little wonder she found John dull. But when she suddenly turned the conversation to the old time—and spoke of Dick and pretty little Mary, and laughingly rehearsed the episode of the bite, she began to feel she might have misjudged John. He looked very far from dull and his laugh was not the laugh of a stupid person.

They walked on together all the way to the cottage, where Mrs. Wharton was introduced, and where the newcomers very willingly accepted John's invitation to sit down. Jack Wurts proved not only a daily visitor, but would gladly have *spent* the days if invited, and refused none of the invitations, of which John was prodigal, to sail, or visit the life-saving station, or the lily-pond at Tuckerton on the mainland, or to share in any of their moderate dissipations. In inviting him John felt much as Sir Philip Sidney must have felt in performing the historic act which has stood for the acme of chivalry, only in his own case he had not the heart to say, or feel, that Jack's "necessity" was "greater than his." It was Mary's that concerned him nearly. The week in the city under his mother's eye, which he had partly dreaded, rose before him as an oasis, though that too might turn out a mirage. If he had noticed any lack of enjoyment of the lad on Mary's part, he would soon have managed to avoid him; but he could not help seeing that she took pleasure in this new kind of intercourse and liked Jack's very jolly com-

pany. There was not the least approach to sentimentality between them; but then they were rarely *tête-à-tête*. John's magnanimity would have reached easily to that point; but Mary herself had no mind to dispense with his society, whoever else might be with her. "Oh, John, aren't you coming?" or "Where are you going?" would generally suffice to change his purpose. Certain things were, in her mind, John's special province, and when Jack asked her to go to church, or to bathe with him, she calmly declined with no other excuse than that she wanted to go with John.

George Raymond had come down to spend the first Sunday of this new régime with them, and he listened in pleased and touched amusement to a colloquy which took place under his nose on the piazza of the cottage. He had not heard the invitation given, but he heard Mary's distinct refusal.

"Does Mr. Brown always expect you to go to church with him?" John was upstairs at the moment.

"Expect!" was Mary's quick retort. "No, he never *expects* anything, but I'm going to church with him as long as I live—if I can." A sudden recollection clouded her face. "Only I won't have many more chances now, for I have to go to school, and—" She broke off abruptly, remembering that Sundays after that were an unknown quantity. Jack recognized the signs of feeling that was a little too strong. He was very much disappointed; for his mother had willingly excused his attendance on her, and he had felt no little elation at the thought of escorting this "prettiest girl in the whole place,"

and showing on what intimate terms they already stood; but he had good stuff in him, and he admired real feeling, and was, moreover, touched by the thought of Mary's fatherless condition. He supposed her home was with John, in town or out, that she was "adopted," or "something of that sort," but, of course, John "wasn't *her father* by a jugful and it was tough having to go to boarding-school."

"Don't you want to go to school?" he asked, sympathetically. "I'm sure Mr. Brown 'd let you go to day-school, if you liked better."

"You don't understand," Mary said, with a dignity that George thought very womanly. He saw her chin tremble and her brave and successful effort at self-control, as she went on quietly. "I don't live with John. I am to live with Miss Newlin, who owns the school."

"Oh, I see!" He evidently saw a good deal. "Well, I hope awfully much you'll like it, and I know you will. Girls have great times at boarding-school, and you're bound to make a heap of friends in no time." Mary smiled a courageous little smile, but said nothing. The boy's eyes rested on her with an expression that was almost loverlike. "Will they let fellows come out to see you sometimes?" he asked, eagerly.

"I don't know. I suppose so. Miss Newlin only said she hoped John would come out as often as he wanted." The recollection seemed wonderfully cheering. "I like Miss Newlin very much," she added.

"Mr. Brown is in luck," Jack said, sententiously,

"and you've got the right sort of grit. Well, if you won't go to church, what are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Entertain Mr. Raymond," Mary said demurely.

"Oh, I say!" Jack burst out laughing in George's face and walked off in excellent humor, in spite of his many reverses.

In the afternoon, as Mary sat on a rubber blanket between her two cavaliers with breastworks of sand as backing for the party, he strolled along and took up a stand in front of her, looking ruefully down on her barricaded state. "I hope you're enjoying your entertainment, Mr. Raymond," he said at last, making a wry face at George, who he decided was a "darned good-looking fellow and not so awfully old, either."

"I never enjoyed myself better," George said, smiling provokingly up at him. As for John, his face expressed absolute contentment. Mary's hand had gone straight into his when she saw the youthful swain approaching, and she had said in the tone of supreme command which she knew how to use when need was: "John, you're not to budge, for politeness nor anything else!" So John retained his place, and was slow about relinquishing the hand, the more so that the roguish sea-breeze, turning accomplice, covered it with a fold of the shawl, Mary had put down between them. The fact that he might have held her hand, unrebuked, before the world, made the little happening none the less deliciously clandestine.

Jack stood awhile, chatting easily. He had all

the freshman's self-confidence, but he decided he was out of it this time, and strolled off down the beach to try his luck with a more approachable damsel whom he knew.

As Mary's eyes came back from following him for some distance, they suddenly met another pair directed straight at her and she recognized the good-looking man who had looked so intently at her the other day on the beach, and who had told his companion to "shut up." There had been some fascination about him for Mary, and she had seen those same eyes in her mental vision several times, and had even idly wondered what it would be like to talk to a man who looked like that, and whether if "he" looked like that when the time came for a "he," John would approve of him.

He was walking slowly, his hands behind his back, and his figure bent forward as though more intent on his own thoughts than on the fine surf or scattered groups of "beachers." His face, from listless, turned to lively, as his eyes fell on Mary. His path was directly in front of them, without malice prepense, and he did not look at the trio more than courtesy permitted; but in that instant he had contrived to make her understand that he recognized her and was pleased to recognize her. John saw nothing unusual in the stranger's glance at Mary—it was an old story—but he did notice her color rise and her lashes droop. When she looked up at him a moment later, however, her eyes were as frank as usual.

"That's Dave Chandler," George said, in the voice of one who tells an interesting fact. "He's a very

aristocratic looking fellow, isn't he? But from what I hear, he's pretty fast."

"What does 'fast' mean, Mr. Raymond?" Mary asked, with evident interest to know. "I asked Father once and he said he didn't just know. He had lived out of the world all his life and didn't know just what 'fast' people did."

That from honest Dick! George hesitated. "Does it mean he hasn't good principles?" she asked.

"That's just about what it does mean," he answered, with relief. "He may have good points. That man has, I know; but he has a screw loose somewhere in his moral machinery."

With this Mary was fain to be content, though neither the subject nor its object entirely left her mind.

CHAPTER XVI

THE "LITTLE GREEN SNAKE"

THE Brown house on Arch Street was a double one, with large rooms on each side of the hall. The entrance was several feet above the street and was approached by a flight of those white marble steps, so typical of the Quaker City and so trying to the souls of careful housekeepers. If John Patterson had kept account of the hours he had spent on his knees restoring the dazzling purity of those steps, and could have subtracted it from the sum total of his years, he would have looked considerably younger than he did on the morning of Mary's arrival, as he sprinkled marble-sand and plied his much-used scrubbing-brush. (Other people might find modern inventions for cleaning their steps, but Mrs. Brown always used sand.) He was much excited at the prospect of their visitor. Nothing so unusual had happened in that house for years, and though both he and Hannah had passed the age when excitement was necessary to them, they had enjoyed the weeks at Beach Haven extraordinarily, and the house in Arch Street had seemed painfully quiet afterward. One morning he had mildly hinted as much to John, who was awaiting his mother in the dining-room where our acquaintance with him

first began. John had given him a curious look, with what tried to be a smile, and then had said with a sigh: "We mustn't expect vacation all the year round."

"No, but I wish we had Miss Mary all the year round!" was the bold answer. Its boldness had so surprised himself that he had beat a hasty retreat to the pantry without even looking at his master, whose head was bent over his letters.

And now they were to have her for a short week! Would she seem the same in such different surroundings, and would Mrs. Brown "take to her" as both John and Hannah devoutly hoped? If she only would! And would suggest Mary's coming to live there; or if— "She'll be growin' up before long," the honest soul said to himself, as he plied his brush with renewed energy. Hannah put her head out of the window of the right-hand, third-floor front, and smiled down on his bent, unconscious back. She had picked a little bunch of heliotrope and tea rosebuds, and arranged them in just such a posy as she had often watched Mary make, and disposed it on the dressing table with tender care, adjusting and readjusting it half a dozen times before she seemed to find it satisfactory.

The modest trunk had come and was already installed at the foot of the bed. "I wish I had the key to it," Hannah thought, "and could have her own things about so she'd feel at home right away." She shared her "better-half's" unspoken apprehension.

The house was divided, downstairs, into a square library on the right, as you entered, with the stairs

in an alcove behind it, and behind those, the afore-said dining-room "giving" on the high-walled garden which was John's pride. To the left of the hall there had once been a single room of immense size, such as one only finds in those old-fashioned, high-ceiled houses; but John's father had had it partitioned, and had converted the back end into a snug "den" for himself, which was at the time of which I write, John's own sanctum. Here no one disturbed him without cause, and into it none of their rare guests so much as peeped. Mr. Brown had always been jealous of liberties with his room, and the children had never gone into it except on an errand, or by special invitation to play under their father's eye. His wife had recognized the sanctity of every book and paper and had always given strict injunctions to the man or maid whose business it was to clean it. She had seldom sat down in the room unless to consult her husband on important business; and gentle as John's whole régime was, the old feeling of awe hovered over the little precincts, and no one entered uninvited except to sweep or dust. John had often asked his mother to come in and sit with him, but she frankly confessed that she never felt at home there, and he was, on the whole, relieved to have this spot where he was left entirely to himself and where every paper or book that he put down stayed just where he could "put his hands on it,"—to use his father's favorite expression. She had a little sitting-room just above, separated from her large front bedroom by a bathroom, added at a later date, and lighted by a shaft to the roof. The

room had been Margaret's as a child, and only her mother had used it since. John had expressed his wish to give up his second floor bedroom to their visitor, but had not pressed the point in the face of his mother's astonished disapproval. He always longed for his old third-story quarters, where he was out of the way in case of a guest, and to make this guest climb above him was a hard trial.

"You will completely spoil her, John," Mrs. Brown said sharply, looking narrowly at his heightened color. She had had his room connected with hers by a glass partition across the end of the hall, over the lower half of which ran crimson silk curtains. In this little neutral space between their two rooms she loved to sit with her sewing (she was not a great reader) and it was here that she sat enthroned in state—for her backbone was unusually straight—while John Patterson and Hannah were so eagerly preparing for their visitor. She felt the excitement in the air; she had seen it in John's face in the morning, and in the faces of both her servants; and had looked with cool inquiry at the little nosegay that Hannah carried to the upper regions. The glass door was wide and the curtains drawn. She could see all that went on and Hannah felt constrained to explain two or three borrowed articles that "she thought Mr. John would like put in Miss Mary's room." Mrs. Brown felt sure that she had heard him go up there himself that morning before breakfast; but when, prompted by curiosity rather than hospitality, she had later climbed the stairs, she had seen no signs of his visit. She was determined to receive this girl very graciously, but

resented the sort of covert ovation they seemed to be planning for her.

A florist's box of generous proportions had come soon after breakfast and she had looked with impassive face at the address: "Miss Mary Farnham, care of Mr. John Brown, etc.," while deciding that John himself must have sent it. "She doesn't know anybody else, does she?" was her mental question, as she calmly told John Patterson to put it in the cellar till "Miss Farnham" came. Poor lady, she had suffered much that summer and suspected that there was more in store for her.

She heard the sound of John's latch-key in the door—or, to be more exact, she heard the opening of the door which she knew had followed the latch-key. She rose and went to the landing of the staircase, but as there were two turnings, she could not see the hall below.

"I'm up here, John," she called in her pleasant, well-bred voice. Surely, even her scrupulously cordial plan of behavior did not require her to go down stairs to receive this school-girl!

"Very well, Mother, we'll come right up," was the ready answer. Was it imagination that the tone was less cheery than usual?

"I'll put your umbrella in the rack, down here, Mary," she heard him say; "it will be handier."

There was no audible reply and she did not see the meeting of the two pairs of eyes as John stood aside to give his companion precedence on the stairs. Both were upturned as they rounded the landing, and John said, with just a suspicion of effort in his

voice: "You didn't expect us so soon, did you?"

"No," she answered abstractedly, her eyes on Mary. Even while she smiled, a perfectly irreproachable, welcoming smile, and held out her hand at the stair head, her mind was busy wondering how much this girl knew of her own power. No one could look like that and not know it!

"I'm very glad to see you," she said. "John has written me so much about you." She had meant to add a few words of sympathy, but the words balked.

Something of wistfulness in the grave, candid eyes that met hers unwaveringly, destroyed her perfect composure and gave her the uncomfortable sensation of being "weighed in the balance and found wanting." Was it the same face that had responded so warmly to Mrs. Wharton's first greeting, the same Mary who had been all over the Beach Haven cottage in ten minutes and whom Hannah had described as "sunshine!" John felt the difference acutely. He intuitively knew that his fears had not been groundless. This quiet, self-possessed young woman had pride as well as wistfulness in her face, and looked years older than the child of Beach Haven.

"Your trunk has come. Would you rather go straight to your room, or will you sit down here for a little while first?" Mrs. Brown asked, hastily covering Mary's lack of words. "I know Hannah has tried to make things comfortable, but if there is anything you want, you must let me know." The tone was kind and the voice reminded Mary a little of John's, but she felt no wish to sit down,

and was relieved that Mrs. Brown evidently did not expect it.

"Thank you, I don't believe I shall want anything," she said very quietly.

John's quick ear and eye detected what was hidden to his mother. He would not let her leave them so! All the cowardice of which he was capable was tugging at his will. He downed it with a quick resolution. With the most matter-of-course tenderness he put his arm around the girl and drew her close to him, smiling down at her in a way to disperse any possible cloud of formality.

"The city will seem strange to you, I am afraid," he said, "but I will show you my little bit of country when you come down. You won't be long, will you?"

His loyal effort was entirely successful so far as Mary was concerned. Her face was transfigured in a moment; but he could hardly have done anything less calculated to unbend his mother. The sight of *John* in such a relation to any girl, much less a girl who looked as mature as this one, hurt Mrs. Brown to the quick, and she could hardly summon enough self-control to smile a wan little smile. There must be many mothers who can deeply sympathize with her. It seemed to her the hardest moment she had known since Margaret's death.

"Hannah," she called in a constrained voice, "will you show Miss Farnham her room."

Mary mounted the stairs like her old self as the cordial response came from above, and Mrs. Brown heard the pleasure in both voices as they greeted each other. There was no doubt that this unwished-

for guest was regarded by most of the household as, in some sense, a member of the family. If she had seen Mary's arms thrown impulsively around the beaming Hannah, and her hearty kiss as heartily returned, she would have known that the conquest was complete in that quarter. She could see that it was complete with John, though she did not yet understand what that meant. He tried to seem his natural self, but the effort was unavailing, and they had never talked together across such a gulf. Dick Farnham had never so effectually come between them as this child of his. If Mrs. Brown could only have opened her heart to the girl as spontaneously as Mrs. Wharton had done, this story would have been quite different.

"She is very beautiful," she said in the manner of one who is determined to be perfectly fair; but the sequel soon came out: "She reminds me very much of her father."

"Does she?" John exclaimed, surprised. "She *is* very like him, but I didn't think of your seeing a likeness in her face."

"It is in the way she has of looking at you and the expression about her mouth and chin. She will not always be easy to manage, I am afraid." She tried to say it lightly, but her manner and voice had a touch of asperity. John looked pained, but made no answer. There was the sound of a laugh from above—a very pretty, merry little laugh it must have seemed to anyone—Mrs. Brown saw his face brighten and soften. It told more than his smile and caress had done a few minutes ago.

On the way to the garden John showed Mary the rooms on the ground floor, and her interest in all the things that concerned him personally brought the pleased color again and again to his face. She looked all around the sacred "den" without knowing that she was taking an unheard-of liberty; asking where his favorite books were, taking them, one by one, out of the cases and handling them with loving fingers and evident curiosity as to their contents.

"You may come here at any time to read or amuse yourself," he said eagerly, "whether I am here or not. It will be a great pleasure to me to have you."

"And I shan't disturb you if you are writing or reading?" Mary asked with adoring eyes raised to his and the soft color flushing all her fair face. He suspected that she would very much disturb the even tenor of his thoughts, and it was characteristic of him that he did not deny it, but said simply: "If you do I shall like to be disturbed."

She did not thank him in words; she gave him a look that made his pulses throb, and with the grace and simplicity of a loving child, she stooped and kissed the book she held, a much worn copy of Robert Browning's "Men and Women," which John had just said was perhaps the one he loved best of all. He suddenly drew away from her and seemed to be hunting something on his desk.

When they came in from the garden to luncheon John Patterson bethought himself of the florist's box and produced it at once, smiling all over his broad face. Mary looked in astonishment at the big box, and colored prettily. It was her first experience

of this sort of attention, and even Mrs. Brown had to own that her manner was natural and good. The box held an over-sumptuous mass of roses and Jack Wurts' card. He had shown a good deal of feeling over a bathing accident she had had just before leaving Beach Haven and had been at the station to see her off next morning, with a notebook ready for any number of addresses, and repeatedly expressed intentions of seeing her soon and often.

"It is very nice of him," she said with shy pleasure, "but I wish he hadn't sent so many!"

For a wonder John's jealousy of the lad had been quite laid to rest. "Perhaps he thought the extent of his regard could only be expressed in numbers," he answered with a merry little smile. His mother looked at him keenly, but she saw that he was not acting. She did her best during luncheon, and Mary's normal belief in the good will of all the world came back in some degree. She was so patently simple and direct that Mrs. Brown could not long accuse her of designs to subjugate John; but the jealous pain was none the less, as she marked the signs of her *unconscious* influence.

"I always thought he was happy with me," she said to herself with a sore heart, and as she met his eyes with that look of soft content in their very depths, she had much ado to keep back the tears.

But poor Mary was fated to rub against all her hostess' pet theories and prejudices, and John's happiness was to be of a very mixed kind.

Next morning he announced that, before starting to his office, he must glance over some papers that had

come by the morning's mail, and retired promptly with them to his den. Mary went up to her room, and Mrs. Brown thought her still there when, a half hour later, she went to the door of the den to remind John of an important engagement. What was her astonishment and anger to see Mary seated on a stool near him, "*rummaging*" (so Mrs. Brown defined it) in a drawer of the sacred desk. Her face told her feelings in no uncertain language as she stopped in the doorway and said icily, "I beg pardon for disturbing you, but I wanted you to be sure not to forget to go to Carter's about the range."

John turned himself quickly on his screw-chair and rose with color heightened by her tone. Mary, too, scrambled to her feet, trying not to drop her treasure trove, but several daguerrotype cases rolled upon the floor. Mrs. Brown's indignant eyes took pointed note of them, and then swept the innocent offender as no one had ever looked at her in her life. No words were needed. Not a word did either of her listeners say as she turned away and mounted the stairs with heavy tread.

Mary had reseated herself, and was picking up the fallen daguerreotypes and putting them back in their places. John sat down mechanically and seemed lost in thought till he heard her softly shutting the drawer. He started and turned toward her. "What are you doing?" he asked sharply.

She did not look at him. "I would rather go away now," she said pushing the drawer home and moving as if to rise. "I know your mother thinks I ought not to have come in here."

But John had grasped her hands and held her fast. His gaunt face was all a-quiver.

"No, no!" he said thickly. "My mother does not understand! I will explain to her; I will tell her that I asked you to come—that I want you— Oh, child!" as he saw her pale and grave, the determination on her face unshaken, "let me keep you with me every minute I can!" It was like a cry of pain. He felt that he had startled her by his passion, and let go her hands, while he made a strong and successful effort to control himself. "It was always the rule that we were never to disturb Father when he was busy here," he said quietly, "and Mother clings to the old tradition, though I have often asked her to come in. I *have* been fond of being alone here, but—" He took her hand again and held it fast. There was a long pause.

"You have only been here a few minutes, but I—" He choked in spite of the effort to be calm.

Almost she understood. She did not look up, but drew the hand that held hers till her hot cheek rested upon it. Deep was answering unto deep. For many minutes there was no sound in the little room but the ticking of the clock.

CHAPTER XVII

"FORM" AND SUBSTANCE

JOHN tried hard to make up to his mother for all he knew she suffered on Mary's account, but even his tenderness and tact were misinterpreted. He felt it so, and forgave her because he understood and knew himself to be an offender. How could he give her the one thing she wanted—the assurance that she still held the first place with him? Mrs. Brown, on her part, felt the futility—the worse than futility—of criticizing Mary to John. She knew that adverse criticism, however mildly and carefully uttered, hurt and troubled him (though to her credit be it said she had no idea how much). She did try to be just, and even generous, but it was not in human nature to refrain from pointing out to him certain palpably weak spots in his idol. "She was thankful he *was* fond of her since he must perforce be burdened with the care of her, but it aggravated her to see him making himself ridiculous. If he wanted her sitting in his den while he was at work, why—that was all there was about it!" But it wasn't all by any means, as John knew, and as Mary knew. Nothing would induce Mary to accept the freedom of the sacred premises during John's absence, and though she yielded to his passionately expressed wish to have her with him

when he was at home, the pleasure was inevitably marred for them both.

Mrs. Brown had early voiced her disapproval of Mary's calling her guardian by his "Christian" name. "It is not fitting," she said severely, "and you ought to tell her so for her own sake. People will comment on her behavior to you, too, as well as on the title."

John had the grace to blush hotly, but he answered her steadily: "You are entirely mistaken, Mother. I *asked* her to call me John instead of 'Uncle John', which was her own choice."

Mrs. Brown looked at him sharply and searchingly. "I don't understand you, John," she said coldly. "If you wish to raise her to your own generation, you should not fondle her as you do."

John's color faded out and left his face white and set. His mother had thrust ruthlessly through the weak spot in his armor and stabbed him home. He waited a moment before he answered quietly: "You don't suppose that I am just taking advantage of her innocence and my position of trust! I have tried not to—to touch her—except when it seemed right; but she has been used to very affectionate little customs with her father, and she—she is fond of me—and accepts me in his place. It would have been cruel to have held off at first, when she needed everything I could give her; but—I do want to make her understand by degrees." He tried unsuccessfully to keep those tell-tale lips from trembling. His mother was touched, but far from satisfied.

"I suppose staying with that Irish woman who

nursed her has made her feel more at home in the kitchen than in the parlor," she said with involuntary sarcasm. "I never heard her say anything coarse," she added in a milder tone; "but I do wish she could be more like other girls!"

John could have found it in his sore heart to smile. "You need not worry about that, Mother," he said dryly. "Boarding school will change her fast enough."

"Well, I shall be thankful when she is there!" The words were no sooner out than she regretted them, but she could not say so. "I mean on your account," she added lamely.

John went to his own room and began to get ready for bed, but he stopped midway and sank into a chair by the window, resting his head on his hand and letting the night breeze cool his hot forehead. He was forced to analyze the pain his mother's attitude toward Mary caused him. Was there perhaps, unacknowledged to himself, a little hope gaining lodgment in his secret heart? Had he been trying to make Mary, as his mother had said, "of his own generation"?

"Do you know anything about cricket, Mary?" he asked her next morning at breakfast, looking up from an open note in his hand, with a face full of indecision.

Mary suspended operations on the shell of an egg, and raised expectant eyes to his. "No," she said, "but I want to."

His whole face brightened. "They want me to go out to-morrow to substitute in a match with the 'Merion.' It is a sort of trial match, as we are both to play the English team in a couple of weeks, and one

of our best bowlers is taken ill. They say they must have me, and I must get all the practice I can between now and then."

A look of satisfaction settled over Mrs. Brown's face. "You surely won't refuse, John," she said quickly.

"No," hesitatingly—"I guess not. I was thinking, Mary. I told George's mother and sisters that I would bring you to call on them some day, and we might go this afternoon and invite one of them to go out with us to the match to-morrow and keep you company while I am playing. I am sure they would be pleased."

"Are they nice?" Mary asked innocently, peering down into her egg. (John Patterson had been well trained in the matter of Mary's tastes. He knew her foreign habits had disinclined her for the old-time meat-and-fried-potato breakfast to which the Brown family were used, and he never forgot anything that concerned her. Mrs. Brown had ventured no remonstrance when he had appeared with a large piece of honey on the day before Mary's arrival, and had told her with an air of simple finality that "Miss Mary" always ate it.) She was offended with Mary's over-frank question, the more so that she thought she detected a twinkle in John's eyes before he bent them on his plate.

"They are exceedingly nice ladylike girls," she answered tartly.

Mary looked at her with those wide, grave eyes that reminded her so disagreeably of Dick. The question on the tip of the girl's tongue stayed there

till she and John were on their way to the Raymonds' after lunch.

"How old are they, John?"

"I wouldn't ask them for the world!" He turned to her with a bright, amused glance. "But my memory is good, and I know Miss Emma used to be ten years older than George, and Miss Elsie a good deal younger. That would make Miss Emma about forty now, and I suppose Miss Elsie is twenty-five or six."

"Oh, they're grown-up ladies!" was Mary's disillusioned comment.

In the old days Margaret had been inclined to tease John over the conquest of Miss Emma Raymond, and had always been properly rebuked, but John was not wholly unconscious that George's older sister had a regard for him that was not of his soliciting, and that he certainly did nothing to encourage. It was years now since he had thought anything about it and Miss Emma's middle-aged primness and gentleness were never broken through by any behavior that could possibly give rise to comment. Nevertheless it was quite true that, through all the changing years, that secret sentiment, which ought long ago to have died of malnutrition, would persist in living on as a sad, emaciated little inmate of Miss Emma's kindly heart, always thrust into corners and never presented to company.

Mary spent a rather uneasy twenty minutes among the "cows and chickens" of George's family barn-yard, for she was without barn-yard etiquette of any kind and their volubility left her speechless. She was little used to women, and their particular type (who

talked a great deal about things of which she knew nothing, asking her questions to which they fortunately seemed to expect no answers), made her register a vow never to go into "society." She did not know that the Raymonds were not at all fashionable people and would probably have been much improved by a larger social experience, though it is to be doubted whether any surface polish could have made them other than the kindly, commonplace creatures they were. Mary had no suspicion that they were shyer of her, for all their eloquence, than she had ever been of anyone. She only knew that she longed to get away. John knew it too, and broke off the conversation he was trying to carry on with Miss Emma, to say that he thought they must be going. Mary looked at Miss Emma's gentle face and decided to take the matter of the invitation into her own hands.

"Have you asked Miss Emma to go with us to the cricket to-morrow?" she asked with such an innocent face that John was baffled. Had she misunderstood his suggestion about "one" of George's sisters or was this intended for a pointer? The invitation was accepted with a pleasure that was evidently too strong to find expression in ordinary words. Mary silently noted the fluttered pink on Miss Emma's thin cheeks, and as they started home her hand stole into John's and she forgot to confess her coup till he asked her.

"Do you know it isn't considered good form to hold hands on the street?" He held hers tightly as he looked laughingly down at her.

"But we don't care anything about 'form,' do we?" She returned both the smile and pressure.

"I'm afraid I ought to try to make you care a little more," he said ruefully.

* * * * *

"Now, Emma, do put on your new blue foulard to-morrow. It's so becoming, and foulards don't spot like Indias even if there should be a few drops of rain," Mrs. Raymond urged with her most contented purr. (George was used to purring in genuine house-cat style, albeit his boarding-school metaphor had been drawn from a barn-yard.)

"Catch her!" Miss Elsie laughed the short, high-pitched laugh that had decided Mary's choice of a companion for the morrow. "If there's a cloud as big as my hat you'll see her getting off in her old brown grenadine with an umbrella!"

But from her shelter behind the lace curtains, Miss Emma was watching a picture on the street, and never heard a word.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CRICKET MATCH AND A "LUCK-PENNY"

THE round September sun seemed struggling to cast his beams up Arch Street, through the river mist and city smoke, for the express purpose of darting them in at a certain third-story window, where lay, he knew, as sweet a picture as could be found in all the length and breadth of the Quaker City. Balked in his effort to bend them by so much as the fraction of an inch, he threw an angry red glare over the white frame of the window, and hung there in impotent fury. The picture within was a good-humored one, and opening sleepy eyes at his approach, quickly made them wider and sprang up. She drew on a wrapper (for there were some conventions that she *did* regard) and going straight toward him, leaned a little forward and let him kiss her happy face to his heart's content. Thus mollified, his red countenance soon changed and he beamed upon her like the lover of beauty he was. 'Tis true he beamed with even added warmth upon Miss Emma Raymond's equally happy but much less lovely face, when, a half-hour later, having climbed the intervening roofs, he looked full in at her eastern chamber window.

Did John have second-sight to see the wooing

going on over his head, or did his quick ear perchance detect the light tread of bare feet on the floor above? His mother, from her bed, heard him humming an old, familiar air as he emerged from his bath; and just at that moment it formed itself into words: "That e'er the sun shone on," rang out in his low baritone, and then, as though the unexpected sound of his own voice brought sudden self-consciousness, the music stopped. Mrs. Brown smiled; then her brows drew together and she sighed. Singing at his toilet was one of John's cheery habits, which had been growing less of late years. If the sound of its renewal was as sweet to her as the sight of his brighter, more boyish face, the recognized cause of both smote on her heart and made it contract painfully. If she had seen the little party, whom George had joined, settle itself, a few hours later, in the middle of the grand-stand, she would have been still more forcibly struck with the change.

"This is a good place," John said. "Here you are as nearly as possible back of the wicket, and a little out of the glare," appraising the rolling of the crease with a critical eye.

"It doesn't matter where we sit so we can see you play," Mary said, giving voice to Miss Emma's sentiments with a simple matter-of-factness the elder woman could not help envying. John left them almost immediately to get ready for play, for Germantown was to go first to the bat they had learned on entering the ground; but he promised to be back soon, as "his services were not likely to be needed till well on in the game."

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"John isn't a good bat," George explained as the tall figure disappeared into the club-house. "I mean, he isn't steady; they can't count on him. He's *great* if he gets 'set,' and he's so strong it's nothing to him to send a ball over the grand-stand, let alone the ropes; but he's apt to miscalculate and get caught out, especially if the bowling bothers him. It's bowling they're counting on him for to-day; he's a splendid round-arm bowler when he's in practice."

"I'm afraid I've kept him from practicing, but he'll have some chance before the English match." Mary said it bravely and George gave her an approving glance; but the signal for clearing the ground changed the gloomy current of her thoughts. For several minutes she was busy watching the awkward movements of the roller horses, with their great muffled feet, the groups of stragglers moving off in every direction, and the explosive entrance of the visiting team, who burst from the club-house like a troop of boys just let loose from school. The white-clad figures scattered themselves over the field, playing at leap-frog, pitching and tossing the balls, and going through an endless variety of antics on the way to their appointed places. Mary watched the bowler sending furious balls at the undefended wicket "to get his hand in," and was trying to imagine John in the character when the object of her thoughts rejoined them. He looked a new person, in his crick-eting flannels with heavy leg-pads and blue and white striped "blazer." He took off the canvas hat with its gay band as he came up, and seated himself beside

Miss Emma; and something in Mary's almost startled glance made his heart beat quicker. She had never looked at him before with that half-shy scrutiny. The fact was that he appeared full ten years younger than usual, and consequently not more than his real age, and he had been guilty of his first act of vanity (unless we except the incident of the trouser-creases) and had bought himself a tie of the color of his coat, which became him well. He read the success of his venture in truth's own mirrors and his thin, bronzed cheeks took on a warmer tone as he quietly answered Miss Emma's questions about the men going in to the bat.

"The bowler at this end is a demon," he said, his eyes intent on the preparatory gyrations of the wiry little person in question: "His balls twist right in to the wicket when they seem heading a yard off it. Look at that!" He drew in his breath sharply and half rose from his seat: "Clean bowled!" he gasped, sitting heavily down again, with a face of consternation. "That's one of our very best bats. I can see him making short work of me!"

"Bad beginning, good ending," Miss Emma said with a little purring laugh and a delicious sense of being in a position to offer consolation to John on even so unimportant a matter as this seemed to her. There was absolute quiet in the little group and then a general rustle of satisfaction as the next man took the demon's second ball successfully and sent a third to the ropes. The satisfaction was short-lived, however, for after a timid half-dozen runs had been added to the score, the new man sent a ball straight

into the hands of a jubilant fielder. Mary saw a little blond man approaching them from behind, and, as he took the vacant seat back of John, George whispered to her that that was the captain of the Germantown team.

"Good Lord, Johnny!" he groaned as he sank down harder than would have seemed reasonably possible to his small bulk, "that man's a demon!"

Mary smiled at the juvenile title for her dignified giant, and the captain's admiring eyes meeting her's made John's hasty introduction almost superfluous.

"If either of you ladies has a rabbit's foot or any good strong charm, now is your time," the little man said gravely. "Please do your level best to brace up Brown."

"Oh, I've got a luck-penny in my purse!" Mary cried with delighted recollection, as she drew forth a pierced sixpence through which was knotted a bit of foreign-looking string.

"That'll do the business!" the captain said, his laughing eyes withdrawn from the field for the moment, but only for the moment. "Look at Tommy Moran!" he exclaimed suddenly, addressing himself again to John. "The crittur's got him all tied up in a knot! Just what I expected!" as a dull thud was accompanied by an attempt on Tommy's part to fall over his own legs, and the ball was held aloft by the challenging wicket-keep. "Leg before wicket; three men out for nine. This is a funeral! John, you go next, and you've got to stick, with that charm!" He gave Mary a whimsical smile as he rose and went to meet the crestfallen Tommy.

"I'm afraid I'll only lengthen the procession," John said ruefully.

There was a long silence after the fifth man took his place. Ball after ball was bowled and not a run was made.

"I do wish they wouldn't waste so much time walking around!" Mary said fretfully. "Just when you think the batter may be going to do something, they stop playing and all begin to change places. What do they do it for? It's dreadfully tiresome!"

George doubled up with enjoyment of the, to him, pertinent criticism, while John leaned around Miss Emma and, with twinkling eyes, explained the meaning of a "maiden over."

"Was that five maidens or six?" George asked gloomily a minute later.

"Six," was the sober answer.

A sudden ball went whizzing up in the air to Mary's delight; but the sight of the men's anxious faces checked her transports. "Oh, it's caught!" she said mournfully.

"It certainly is," George answered grimly.

John said nothing, but rose to go.

"Oh, don't forget the luck-penny!" Mary handed it hurriedly across to him. "I *should* have been ungrateful," he said laughing; but the shine in his eyes made Miss Emma grave for a while and caused her to reconsider the purely fraternal, or rather *paternal*, diagnosis she had just been making of this interesting case. Miss Emma must be forgiven if she made the most of the disparity in years.

Mary took a gold sheath-pin from her dress and

darted after him regardless of the amused and appreciative audience. "Pin it in your pocket with that," she said breathlessly. He gave her a brilliant little smile and was gone.

"By George! he's lucky!" said a man behind them to a friend. Then, as he saw more interest in his companion's face than the circumstances seemed to warrant, he added suddenly, "You know her?"

"No" (it was Mr. Dave Chandler who spoke), "but I saw her at Beach Haven, and heard that she was an orphan, and that that fellow—Brown?—is her guardian."

"Well, I wouldn't mind taking the job off his hands; she's as sweet as a peach!"

Mary, quite unconscious of the comment she had excited, was eagerly waiting for John to cross the field and take his stand. There seemed to her a very unnecessary amount of delay before he finally stepped forward and bent his tall body over the bat.

"The same old story," George said tensely, "but I'm glad to see him getting his bearings. I don't want him to do anything rash."

John was blocking balls cautiously, and then there was another "over" and the other man took his turn at the same tedious performance.

"Oh, I do wish he would do something exciting!" Mary said in a pathetic voice. The words were hardly spoken when there was a sharp sound, and a ball rose like a gun-shot straight over the grandstand. The applause was frantic from both friends and enemies.

"He must have a muscle like iron," Mr. Chandler's companion remarked. "I guess I won't meddle much with his ward. I wouldn't care to come into collision with him." He laughed gayly. Mr. Chandler's handsome face wore an odd little smile. "Another, I declare! No, only over the ropes. Look at the girl! Did you ever see anything prettier than her excitement? Whatever she gave him must have been the ticket." But some time later he turned again and said testily: "See here, man, look at the field once in a while! I'm sorry I called your attention to her."

"Oh, it's my luck-penny!" Mary exclaimed, while the interest and excitement rose to boiling point among the Germantown sympathizers and the Merion faces grew longer. There would be occasional lulls when nothing happened, but no one had time to feel bored again that morning. One man after another went in and out, making creditable scores after the bowlers were changed (on John's running up a rapid twenty-five); but still he stuck to his post. "He's all right now," George said, looking into Mary's sparkling eyes. "He's good for a hundred!"

He proved a true prophet, for when the last man was caught out at a quarter past one, just in time for the hungry spectators, John had "carried his bat" for 102.

"They'd like to carry him off the field, if he wasn't rather too much of a good thing," George said, casting a furtive glance at his sister's flushed and beaming face and dropping his eyes meditatively to his shoes.

John soon joined them, having run a gauntlet of handshakes and slaps on the back, and looking flushed, too, but more happy than triumphant.

"If everybody's as hungry as I am, there won't be enough lunch to go round," he said, laughingly parrying the congratulations showered upon him, and looking into Mary's radiant face. He saw he had gained more than a cricket match.

Have you ever been in your "teens," and seen a losing game won on the cricket, or football, or baseball fields by the man who was your particular property? If so, you must agree that the President of the United States is a very unimportant person beside the man who "carries his bat" for a hundred. John had won a new place in Mary's esteem if not in her heart. To be our best-beloved friend is one thing; to be a popular hero at the same time is another.

The appetites were all good, but John Patterson's lunch basket was equal to the test, and he won his laurels too.

John's bowling proved much less successful than usual, for he was quite out of practice, and the afternoon would have been disappointing to Mary but for the final victory. Just before the end a little incident left its impress on her mind. She saw the gentleman she had seen at Beach Haven, and whose name she remembered, pass in front of her with a lady. (They had moved their seats after lunch and were close to the front aisle.) He looked at Mary with the same perfectly well-bred but very expressive glance that she had seen in his eyes before, and again

she colored warmly and cast down her own, without knowing why. Someone in the front row stopped the lady to speak to her and Mary had a good chance to look at her, for Mr. Chandler turned his attention to the field, or appeared to do so. His companion was a woman of from twenty to twenty-five, dressed quite simply in a white linen suit with a very becoming hat of dark scarlet straw, trimmed with field-poppies and grasses, and a parasol to match. Mary recognized the quiet elegance of the toilet, but would have been much astonished had she been told its cost. The lady was tall and very slender, without being thin. She had a willowy ease and grace of manner that were most engaging, and a charming smile that would have been mocking but for the great sweetness of the dark eyes. Her hair was black, of a fine, silky texture that, like everything else about her, bespoke good breeding, and Mary would have thought her beautiful but for the almost sickly pallor of her complexion. So attracted was she that she quite forgot Mr. Chandler, until she found that he had turned, and that his eyes were again upon her. Then they moved away.

The lady had not noticed them; but as Mary turned to George to ask if he knew who she was, she saw that he was very white and that his eyes, which were following the handsome couple, had a strange look as of pain.

"George, wasn't that Miss Caroline Hutchinson?" Miss Emma asked, leaning forward to speak to him across Mary. His face regained its wonted expression as he answered her in the affirmative; but he

was very grave all the way home, except when he roused himself from time to time to take part in the brisk conversation carried on by the others. Mary saw John's eyes rest on him occasionally with a questioning gravity.

"John, who is Miss Caroline Hutchinson?" she asked as soon as the other two were out of hearing.

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"I saw her at the match and I liked her looks so much." She spoke with a reservation; but, as John continued to look inquiringly at her, the context came out, even to the mention of Mr. Chandler's name too. John looked interested and grave. "I don't go about enough to know who people are, and I know very few of George's friends and acquaintances," he said. (George was a society favorite, in spite of his unfashionable up-bringing.) John was recalling his friend's face, and Mr. Chandler was a matter of absolute indifference to him.

He had unpinned the sixpence and handed it back to Mary before changing his flannels, expressing his gratitude in comic fashion, but regretting that its influence had not lasted out the game. "Oh, I wanted you to keep it," she had answered, coloring, "for luck and for a keepsake. If it helps for *half* a game, that's something."

"It's a very great deal!" he said, laughing and offering no further thanks, but she saw that she had pleased him very much by the little gift. She was so proud of him, and so fond of him, that there were two exceedingly happy people at Mrs. Brown's din-

ner-table that evening, while mistress, man and maid shared in the satisfaction over the day's event.

For long years Mrs. Brown had been used to John's habit of easy chat with John Patterson during meals, but to find Mary indulging in "familiarities with the waiter man" had given an unpleasant jar to her "sense of fitness." "John Patterson would never take advantage of anyone," but that did not alter the impropriety on Mary's part. It did not occur to her that Mary knew by intuition what she herself could only find out by years of experience.

To-night, however, she even smiled indulgently when the girl lifted a merry face as her soup plate was set before her and said affectionately—there really was no other word to describe it—:

"John, your lunch was so good, and we were all so hungry, I guess when you looked in the basket to-night you felt like the man who took up the collection and was glad to get his hat back."

Mrs. Brown smiled because she was in her most unbending frame of mind. As for the old story, she never could see any joke in it. "Whoever heard of a man losing his hat in taking up a collection!"

CHAPTER XIX

"It's No Use"

HOW strange it seemed to John to be sitting again in the old, familiar Holy Trinity pew with his mother! Had the whole church and service altered, or was it all the effect of the girlish presence between Mrs. Brown and himself? He looked back upon his old self as though it had been someone else who had sat in that spot year after year.

The rector was away and the pulpit was occupied, on this particular Sunday, by a visiting clergyman from Chicago. He was a handsome man, with a thoroughbred face, a commanding figure and a rich voice that betokened long culture; while his sermon gave evidence of the student as well as the devotee. It was plain to see that the impression he was making on the small congregation was a very favorable one; but, again, that odd feeling came over John that the John Brown who sat there six months ago would have listened to him quite differently; that something had vitally, fundamentally changed the John Brown of the present.

Before the sermon Mary had drawn off her gloves, oblivious of the critical glance from Mrs. Brown's observing eyes, and had slipped them into her pocket. She was sitting with her ringless, sunburned hands

(they were well formed, but not small) folded in her lap, in a way that John knew well and regarded as an inheritance from her Quaker forebears. He had seen his mother's disapproving look and felt a strong inclination to cover the brown hands with his bigger, browner one. The old John Brown had had no such impulses; had never felt this warm, irresistible rush of tenderness. As usual, she was drinking in every word of the sermon, but to-day it was a very different one from any that she had heard at Beach Haven, and Beach Haven covered most of her church experience.

The minister was speaking, in his delightful, sympathetic voice, of the great legacy of the historic Church; of that precious transfer of the priestly gift, through the miraculous "laying on of hands;" of the perfect, changeless nature of the truth that had come down all the Christian centuries in the wondrous words of the Creed. One perfectly rounded period followed another. His voice trembled with feeling when he spoke of the irreverent suggestion of altering one word in the great "Credo" which had come from the hands of the Fathers. Surely they had known how to interpret their Lord's belief and teaching as no most gifted modern could ever know. He urged his hearers, with real passion, not to be led to believe that they were free even to interpret its meaning differently to themselves. "That license of interpretation of the great Articles of the Christian faith was one of the most insidious wiles of the Devil to undermine the purity of the 'Faith once delivered to the saints.' Truth was the same in Athanasius' time as it is to-day," he declared. "What Athanasius

meant we must mean if we would not be guilty of imposture."

Whatever the old John Brown might have felt, the present John knew that he was hearing the eloquent sermon through the ears of another; feeling it through another; and that each thought that formed itself behind that white forehead reached him unerringly by some process surer than the newly-adopted telephone, but known only to the great Maker of spiritual telephones.

She never raised her eyes to him to-day; he missed that exquisite little thrill for which he had learned to wait. Mrs. Brown politely forestalled any idea of his sharing his hymn-book with her, as he had always done, by handing her one each time, opened at the proper place. Mary did not sing at all and she missed something in John's voice. He seemed to be slipping away from her further and further, and something choked her.

"That was a wonderfully fine sermon, John," Mrs. Brown said as they started along Rittenhouse Square, Mary still between them and still gloveless.

"I didn't like it at all!" Mary said, in a voice which, without intentional impertinence, carried a sufficiently emphatic contradiction.

John winced, and colored hotly. His mother's lips curled with an expression bordering on triumph as she noted his trouble. She went on without paying the least attention to the uncalled-for interruption. "Who is he? I don't know when I have heard anyone who impressed me as so cultivated and refined and with such an earnest spirituality."

John saw Mary's face flame and her lips tremble. She suddenly put her hand into his and he understood that it was more in regret for her impulsive rudeness than in solicitation of his championship. He felt it a misplaced apology, however, and he saw his mother's lips tighten warningly. Holding the hand in a firm clasp, he tried to answer Mrs. Brown's question and comment, but she was too much vexed to heed him. "Mary," she said suddenly, "even children wear gloves in the city, especially on Sunday."

It was John's lips that quivered now. Mary's right hand went to her pocket without a word, but he would not at once loose the left. His spiritual telephone was to carry back a message, and all that animal magnetism could do to further it the palm and fingers of his strong hand did. "Nothing you can ever say or do will make any difference with me," it said, and Mary read the message aright, but it only made her sorrier and more humble; it roused the mettle in her, and as he released her hand, she put the gloves on with a swelling heart and a resolve not to offend again. She little knew how quickly she was to yield to temptation and with what consequences.

"Mrs. Brown," she said in a low voice, without looking up, "I didn't mean to be impolite. Will you excuse me?" The direct sincerity and sweetness of the appeal did what soft answers are proverbially said to do. Mrs. Brown felt some shame for her own part and said hastily: "Why, certainly, Mary, it was of no consequence. I shall never think of it." The fact of childish conceit differing with her was a

trifle to her and it might help to disillusion John. But she owned that "the girl had a very nice disposition," and had "only been ill trained."

With John it was far otherwise; and, gratified as he was at Mary's apology and the more friendly conversation that followed it, his heart was weighted with a solemn portent. His was indeed to be "a strait betwixt two." It was a cross-roads that made him dizzy and uncertain where to turn or to what stone wall of incompatibility any road might lead. He knew better than to attribute Mary's remark to childish conceit. The rude expression of opinion had been only the result of her frank discussions with her father, but the thought that lay behind was indicative of the warp of her whole nature. Would he wish to see it altered for the sake of—for the sake of what?

As he handed her into the Sixteenth Street car his eyes met hers fully. Neither smiled and there was something deeper and stronger than tenderness or approval in his grave, steady look.

After the Sunday midday dinner was over, Mrs. Brown announced her intention of taking a nap and later paying a visit to a sick neighbor instead of going to afternoon service. Mary looked inquiringly, expectantly, at John. "What do you want to do?" he asked smiling, as his mother left the room.

"I want you to talk to me—about the Prayer-book; about the Creeds. Will you? We can go out in your garden."

He assented, but with a look that suggested a painful operation which no doubt would better be

performed at once. "I am afraid I shall be a broken reed, though," he said sadly.

There was a long silence after they had seated themselves side by side on the broad bench. Mary had the old English book in her hands and was turning the leaves, but John saw that there was no method in her apparent search; she was only finding words to express some feeling that was uppermost in her mind. He had no wish to hurry her. He, too, wanted time; and the short, wordless prayer for guidance came from a very full heart. He was not looking at Mary, though he saw each movement of her nervous fingers. At last she turned to him and he saw that her eyes were full of tears and that her lips were quivering painfully; she tried to steady them.

"John, I am afraid it's no use!"

"No use." He repeated the two words dully, but he thought he understood.

"I feel sure I can never believe what the Creeds say, and I don't know how to make them mean something else, even if it is right to try." John felt that it was no longer a child that was asking his help. There was an intensity in her face that no child's face ever wore. "I have tried so hard to believe them—because of you—and it seems as though it ought to be very easy, when I know so little, to believe what you believe and what Mr. Brooks believes and what so many wise, good people have believed. Father said it didn't matter to him whether the people he loved had the same belief he had or not; but it matters a great deal to me. I

would like to belong to something, but I think I could never be happy if I belonged to anything different from you."

John looked at her with deep solemnity. "Where are the difficulties?" he asked at length.

I think I have said before that John's voice was his one beautiful possession—no, not his only one; for we remember that Mary was not alone in admiring his hands. But his voice, which had a very different beauty from that of the visiting clergyman of that morning, had it not so much by reason of some happy adjustment of the vocal chords, perhaps, as because of a power of adaptation to the thought behind it—the gift of fitting the gamut of tones with perfect fidelity to every shade of feeling, from indignation or scorn to tenderness, sympathy or humor.

"I love to hear you say 'why?' John," Mary had once said to him. "It sounds as though you wanted so much to know the reason and would be so sure to understand."

"I do want very much to know all *your* reasons," he had answered with a very crooked little smile of gratified surprise. His quiet question now carried with it the most ardent wish to know and the most complete promise of sympathy and understanding.

Mary opened the book without any uncertainty, now, as to the place, and read the beautiful, solemn, opening words of the great confession: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:"—Was she going straight through it? he wondered with a curious tremor. She paused, and

the Christ, was alive and near us all now, and we could speak to him."

"I do not believe in the resurrection of the actual flesh, either, but I only take that passage in the Creed to mean the continuation of our personalities, through a spiritual body, in such a way that we shall recognize each other in the next world."

"But in my book it says 'flesh.' If the Americans could change it to 'body,' why couldn't we change some of the other words now, so they would mean what we really think?"

A flash of amusement crossed the tender gravity of John's face. "People would never all mean the same thing, I am afraid," he said, "and the great purpose of creeds and constitutions is to keep stability and unity in an organization for long periods of time. If the Constitution of the United States had been changed every time a popular wave of feeling demanded it, we should not be so strong a nation as we are; and the same thing is true of creeds. But I do believe, when a Constitution ceases to express the people's will or when a creed is definitely outgrown—when very few hold its literal, original meaning—it should be revised (with the greatest care) in spite of all we heard this morning to the contrary." He had been talking as man to man, but his color rose at the remembrance of the little scene that had followed the sermon. His steadfast eyes repeated the assurance of the morning.

Mary's eyes fell for a moment; when she lifted them there was a spark of mischief showing. "I am sure those old men who made the frescos and sculptures

believed the Creed literally," she said. "They painted Jesus going down into a place where people were in torment, and meeting Adam and Eve and other people who were sinners; and I have seen men and women rising up out of their graves, lifting the lids as they came; and Michael is always standing blowing a trumpet."

John smiled. "I wonder how the minister this morning would defend his position against you," he said. Then his face resumed its former gravity. "I have not studied these matters as much as I should, but if men of his temper were the authoritative voice of the Episcopal Church I should be forced to withdraw from it. Luckily they are not. I think God will understand if I interpret the Creed to conform with what I believe to be the truth, though I know it is not what the men meant who made it; but I could not ask you to take my interpretation and I am afraid it would be impossible for you if I did."

Two pairs of grave, wistful eyes carried on the conversation without the help of words. Mary's were the first to droop. She turned them again to the open page of her book.

"Where did they think Heaven was when Christ went up and sat down on God's right hand?" she said after another long pause.

"They thought what people did think before Copernicus; that the earth was stationary, and the firmament a solid arch above it; and somewhere lifted up on high, God sat on a great white throne to regulate and judge the world that He had made.

To me, that phrase of the Creed just means that Christ, after having tasted human life and death, is a glorified Spirit still, at God's right hand; that is, the great spiritual force to carry out God's will for His people; to save them and sustain them, and to judge them. I believe Christ comes every day 'to judge both the quick and the dead,' though it seems as if Jesus himself did not understand his 'Second Coming' as I do."

"Why, John, you think almost like Father, really," Mary answered earnestly. "I wish I could say those things, for I think I believe them that way; but there is something here," pressing her clasped hands to her bosom with unconscious eloquence, "that won't let me."

"You are a Friend, Mary," he said gently. "You follow the 'Inward Light,' and it is all you need. I think it is all we, any of us, need."

"Oh, but I love to go to church, and I love the service and the hymns. I would rather hear you sing hymns than any music I ever heard!" (No wonder the traitorous blood rose to John's forehead.) "And I want to go with you to Communion. Miss Newlin took me once, but I had to sit back by myself. I am *sure* I could say all that service. 'I give *myself*; my soul and body;'" she repeated the words in a hushed voice. "Don't you think they would ever let anyone say that instead of saying they believed in Jesus being 'Very God of Very God, begotten, not made'?"

"I'm afraid not," John said with his eyes on the ground, "but the Church is the poorer for its hedges."

"If I said the Creed because I believe, anything you think must be right?" she ventured timidly.

"No, no," he exclaimed quickly, almost sternly.

"I might be offending against the Holy Spirit in me, and God would not forgive me. The Bible says that is the only sin that never can be forgiven in Heaven or earth."

"Mary," he answered solemnly, "I love my Church, and it would make me very happy to have you belong to it too, to have you take the Communion with me; but I wouldn't influence you against your inward promptings for all the happiness in the world; not to add a *million* communicants to the Episcopal Church. Many people would think me overstrained and foolish, I suppose," he added in a quieter voice, as if almost ashamed of his outburst.

"And you would rather have me go to church with you always, when I can, and still just be a Friend? We shall always know we understand each other, sha'n't we? And believe almost exactly alike in spite of all the creeds and catechisms?"

"The seat by me will always be your seat, whether you are there or not, and I shall always be worshipping with you before God, however far we may be apart or whatever kind of service we may be going through." He spoke with a concentrated intensity of feeling that was akin to passion.

CHAPTER XX

MARY FAILS TO KEEP HER RESOLUTION

DEAR, DARLINGEST CATHARINE:
I am all by myself till lunch time, and I told John I would write a long letter to you. He always is out in the morning and Mrs. Brown is going to meet him for some business to-day.

He asked me to send you his love, and he made me promise to write here at his desk, and he filled the inkstand and arranged things for me; but I don't like to. I am only doing it because I saw it would hurt his feelings if I didn't; but I never feel comfortable in this "den," as they call it, since I found out Mrs. Brown doesn't like me to be here. I don't even feel quite easy when John is with me; but then he says it is his very own room, and he wants me, so I do come and sit while he is working; because, of course, he ought to have what he wants, too, and we haven't many more days to be together.

A tear-blot emphasized the sentence, though Mary went on steadily.

But I should like Mrs. Brown to like me, and I know she doesn't and it makes me sorry all the time. I never tried to make anybody like me before; I always thought they did, or else I didn't care. But you see this is her house, too, and if she doesn't want to have me, why, of course John won't like to ask me to come here.

The writing came to a stop at this point, and Mary's head was down on her arms to the imminent peril

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of the freshly filled inkstand. It was full fifteen minutes later that she picked up the fallen pen and laboriously began again, with a deep, trembling sigh.

I know I am always doing something that she doesn't think is nice, and I stop when I find out; but then it's already done. I never had to think about things before, because you and Father never minded what I did, and John always understands just what I feel like; but I'm going to be very very careful to behave "like a lady." I have heard Mrs. Brown praise girls for being "ladylike," and I don't sit in the kitchen any more since I saw her look disapprovingly at me when I was doing the corn for the cook.

I like to be doing something useful, and at Beach Haven it was all so different; but perhaps Mrs. Brown's kind of ladies don't do things in the kitchen, or perhaps it's because she thinks I'm company. I don't ask John about those things because I don't want to trouble him, and I know it hurts him very much when he sees that his mother is displeased with me. I love him so much I feel as if I should *burst*; but I haven't once asked him to kiss me since you told me not to.

There was another pause, while Mary's head rested on her hand and her mind seemed to have wandered far away. It soon came back and she dipped her pen afresh.

You said men—I mean "old bachelors"—"didn't care for that sore of thing," but I'm sure that's not it.

She looked abstractedly at her pen, but could not find words to express just what she did think was "it."

I should like to do something for him that was *hard* and *disagreeable*, but all I can think of is trying to be ladylike, and he doesn't really care about that: he only cares about his mother's caring. And there's being cheerful about going to school. I know he would feel dreadfully if he knew how I cried about it at night, so I don't speak of school to him, or else I try

to talk very cheerfully. That is as hard as anything I can do, but now I have found it isn't any use; I never can deceive him. This morning I said what a good time I was going to have and he looked at me as though I had hurt his feelings; and then he smiled all of a sudden and the tears came into his eyes, and I'm just sure he *wanted* to kiss me. But he didn't. I hoped he would, but I never said a word. Perhaps he thinks I'm getting too old. Oh, I don't *want* to get old. I want to keep a little girl and be petted! I wish I could put my head in your lap and cry. But I am going to be brave.

Miss Newlin writes me nice letters, and she says my room-mate is the very nicest girl in the whole school. She has been there two years and she is a year older than I am. Her name is Ellen Logan. I suppose she knows just how to behave, and I'm going to copy everything she does. But I haven't told you about my beautiful day, Saturday.

There followed two whole pages of glowing description of the game of cricket in general and of John's performance in this particular game, followed by some matters connected with her school wardrobe of too personal a nature to be here set down.

Mrs. Brown offered to help me get some things. She tries to be nice to me generally, but trying is very different from just naturally *being* nice. Mrs. Wharton liked my ways without trying. We are going to spend the day with her to-morrow. I can't help wishing Mrs. Brown wasn't going, for it is the last day I have with John. He has something important he must attend to in the morning on Wednesday, and then right after lunch he is going to take me to Beechfield.

She finished her letter and decided that she would run out to the nearest letter-box and post it. "I won't need a hat or gloves just that little way," she said to herself. It was in truth but a little way and the street was very quiet. She had reached the box and

was lifting the lid of the slot when the sound of a child's screaming struck her ears. They were the sort of cries to make one's heart stand still; but if Mary's heart stood still it only added wings to her feet. She was down Sixteenth Street like a very Atalanta, and had turned the corner into the alley whence the cries came, in time to see a young woman dragging a little girl through a doorway, while she struck her repeatedly with a stout stick. There were no spectators but a handful of awestruck children as Mary dashed by and followed the woman into the house. One side of the street, which—like so many of its kind—bore an aristocratic name— was flanked with the high, blind wall, and closed service-gates of the Arch Street houses (mostly vacant at this season). Two or three grumbling women came out on neighboring doorsteps in time to see Mary disappear, but their disapproval never took any more active form than grumbling. It knew none to take.

The woman was just closing the door upon her victim when Mary sprang at her like an avenging fury and commanded her to stop in a voice which, combined with the suddenness and strangeness of the apparition, did make the vixen pause for an instant, stick in air. Only an instant, however.

"Mind yer own business!" she hissed in a low voice of concentrated fury, jerking the child away by its arm and bringing her formidable weapon down on it again. But she had underrated her adversary. Like a flash Mary had wrested the stick from her grasp and struck her across the shoulders with all the strength that anger lent her. The child was

loosed at once and ran sobbing through the doorway while the woman flew at Mary like a tiger. But Mary had the weapon and used it with telling effect, albeit mainly in self-defence. (I can only say "mainly," for our heroine's blood was up.) "I'll have the law on ye!" the woman gasped, while cries of "give it to her," came from the small but admiring audience outside the door.

"The law!" It brought to Mary's mind a vision of John, and she turned and fled as fast as she had come. The woman saw that she had made a home thrust and rushed after her, reiterating her threat with ornaments of language not to be repeated. On the pavement, huddled against the wall at the entrance to Sixteenth Street, the child had sunk down in a sobbing, trembling heap, unable to go any further. A poor, ugly, dirty little specimen of humanity she was. Mary went straight to her and picked her up with no clear idea of what she meant to do next. Half a dozen women held back the child's tormentor and expressed their minds in no measured terms. It had only needed a leader to cause a revolution in the neighborhood, and Mary suddenly found herself a heroine, with all the world on her side. It was a small world, and there was no noise except the storming of the infuriated woman. The children were too much astonished to do more than stare. If their educations had included an acquaintance with the Archangel Michael, it is probable that the feeling uppermost in their minds would have shaped itself into the belief that a feminine edition of Michael, halo and all, had suddenly swooped down and vanquished the

demon; for the noonday sun turned Mary's ruffled hair into a very respectable halo, and she truly looked a creature from some other world than that of her companions or the forlorn child whom she held defiantly to her bosom. It was this picture that met the eye of her guardian as he forced his long, impatient legs into leisurely step with his mother, on their way home to lunch. He stopped short, and his sharp exclamation brought Mrs. Brown also to a standstill and made her eyes follow the direction of his. In that one breathless moment John's heart made a photograph that was never to fade from his memory; then he was at Mary's side.

"How came you here, Mary?" he asked in keen anxiety, attempting to take the child. "What has happened?" But the little wretch felt that she was being torn from her protector and clung to Mary with the strength of desperation. Mary told him the main facts as quickly as possible, while the furious woman, from a little distance, hurled threats of vengeance and of "the law." John turned and measured her with one glance, but he only said calmly: "You shall have all the *law* you want. I am a lawyer and a member of the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty and I will see that your case is attended to."

Her rage sank at once into a hysterical whimper, and she declared that she had only been giving the child the punishment it deserved, and that she had been attacked and brutally assaulted in her own house.

"Did you go into her house?" he asked Mary in consternation. She saw the gravity of his face at her answer and understood that she had really been

guilty of a punishable offence. "But, oh, John, you won't give her back the child?" she cried her eyes raised to his, unnaturally big and brilliant with conflicting feelings.

"Not now"; he said quietly, succeeding in inducing the little girl to let him take her. "I hope not at all." He held the child on his arm, while with his left hand he took Mary's to steady and reassure her. The effect now as always was instantaneous.

"Get me a cab from the station," he said, turning to a boy who stood near, and, by voice and manner, taking him at once into partnership in an important business. The urchin nodded and was off.

It was a strange picture that the steadily increasing group of spectators gazed upon. The child had recognized John's spirit, with a child's intuition, and had buried her head on his shoulder; while Mary, with her hand in his, stood close to him, absolutely quiet, her torn and disarranged dress the only evidence of a violent scene.

"Are you the child's mother?" he asked the woman.

"No, she isn't!" came from a dozen lips at once, followed by a confused mass of testimony that made John feel sure of his case and of sufficient witnesses. He wasted very few words now; but when the boy came back, triumphantly enthroned on the seat of a cab, he thanked him substantially, and, turning to Mary, bade her go home with his mother and leave the whole matter in his hands.

She started reluctantly toward Mrs. Brown, who had not stirred during the whole drama and whose

face bore a look of ill-concealed disgust at being made, in some sort, a participant in a street brawl. "What were you doing without your hat?" she asked Mary frigidly, as they walked toward the house. She was not unkind and would have been glad at any time to go to some trouble to save a child from abuse, "but what possible business was it of Mary's to be prying into the domestic affairs of such people as these and evidently getting into a hand-to-hand encounter with a disreputable woman! She would be thankful to have her out of the house and in the safe custody of a better disciplinarian than John!" A not unnatural wish.

Mary put her hand to her hair in surprise. "I forgot I hadn't on my hat," she said blushing deeply; then she retold her story very briefly, feeling more and more guilty.

"I suppose you meant no harm, but you must be careful not to follow every impulse that comes to you, even if it be a kind one. Wait to consult someone as to the proper way to help. I am afraid you have made a good deal of trouble for yourself and for John."

Mary made no further excuse, and the thought of getting John into trouble after all her resolutions, went to her heart. Of course he would save her from the consequences of her rashness; she never doubted his ability to do so any more than she doubted his will. "I would rather go to prison, though, than let that woman have the child to kill!" And it was no idle boast. She had read of people beating children, but it had seemed something out

of a bygone time, or too remote from her experience to touch her acutely. This sudden confronting with the reality was too terrible to bear! When they reached the door, she followed Mrs. Brown into the house without a word, and without a glance at John Patterson's solicitous face, ran up to her own room. After changing her damaged frock she watched from the window for John's coming, which was not long delayed; but a shy pride prevented her going to him at once. She would let his mother talk to him first. Then she remembered that in a few minutes it would be lunch time; she would wait and go straight to the dining-room and say nothing to him of her regret till the meal was over, and she could find a chance to talk to him alone. Surely she had no need to explain her motives to him!

They were very kind to her, and after John had assured her that the child was in safe, kind hands and would be well cared for, the subject dropped (to John Patterson's keen disappointment). She felt the other John's eyes upon her constantly, though she did not meet them, and the fact that there was no disapproval of her in his voice or manner made her feel none the better; indeed, it made her the more contrite and depressed, and she hardly raised her eyes or ate a mouthful of the things with which John Patterson insisted on covering her plate. As soon as they reached the library she went directly to John and took his hand with the quiet air of possession which Mrs. Brown always found so hard to bear, in spite of her honest efforts to be generous. "John, I am so sorry!" she said with crimsoning

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cheeks. "I meant to be so careful and now I have gone and got you into trouble."

John stood looking down on her, not trusting himself to speak. Did he not love every one of her childish impulses and actions with all the pure passion of tenderness she roused in him? But she *must* be "more like other people" for her own safety and good. He dare not encourage her in what he understood so well and sympathized with from the bottom of his big heart.

"I ought to disapprove of what you have done, perhaps," he said finally, in a low voice, "for I am afraid of the consequences for you; but I think if I had been in your place, I should have done just the same. You see" (his whole face responding to the tremulous gladness in hers) "I am not a fit person to have the care of you, for we are both wrong-headed."

Poor Mrs. Brown!

"Oh, I never knew the world was such a wicked place," Mary exclaimed, covering her face with her hands and shuddering from head to foot. The thought that this was only one of the many cases with which the Cruelty Society had to deal seemed more than she could bear. Mrs. Brown was touched, and she followed a womanly impulse and put her hand on Mary's shoulder. "There are a great many hard things in the world," she said with grave kindness, "but wiser heads than ours are at work to help them and we have to wait till we are sure we are doing the best thing before we interfere. John is giving his whole time to helping people out

of their troubles and you will be able to do your share some day, I dare say."

The look on John's face as his eyes met hers sent the rare color to her cheeks. Mary turned to him at once, too much in earnest even to feel grateful for Mrs. Brown's changed manner. "When I am grown up will you teach me how to help you?" she asked.

"Yes," he said simply.

* * * * *

The intelligent reader probably knows far better than I what is the legal penalty attached to such a misdemeanor as Mary's and what steps it was necessary for John to take to free her from its consequences. I only know that he did free her. How a magistrate might reason in such a case, I cannot attempt to say; but, in all humility, I would ask how that could be called "assault and battery" which was committed with the express purpose of preventing "assault and battery"; and how a breach of peace can occur when there is no peace to break. No doubt I might inform myself on all these questions and attempt to describe how Mary was brought into court, for brought into court she assuredly was, and just what occurred in the "Cruelty" case to which she was forced to witness; but, after being at infinite pains with the main facts, I should be sure to show my ignorance in a minor detail and expose myself to the cynical smiles of the well-informed. The worst that befell her was the aforesaid obligation to appear in court, and an occasional disturbance of her healthy rest by hideous nightmares; the best

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was a much more friendly relation established between herself and Mrs. Brown. It may seem strange that her worst solecism should have gone far to heal the breach made by her lesser ones; but so it was.

CHAPTER XXI

A "HILL OF DIFFICULTY"

IT had come at last, the day that had so long loomed on their horizon; and now, as always, the "hill of difficulty" which had looked so steep ahead of them grew less as they began to mount it and the summit already beckoned as to a view of a land of hope beyond.

As Mary had written Catharine, John had no trouble in seeing through her well-meant histrionic efforts, but he felt that a brave facing of this tremendous new change in her life was the only way for her; and her conduct comforted and reassured him. She was developing fast in these last weeks. In spite of the fresh proof of her childish impetuosity he had become conscious of a new self-control and strength of character, and a new reserve, that were making her older and more womanly. Looking back over the months of their daily, almost hourly, companionship, he saw the difference in her plainly, and, above all, the difference in her attitude toward himself. One period overlapped the next and many single occurrences seemed to contradict him, but looking broadly at the past four months, the lines of demarcation were clear.

It was useless to try to go through the forms of

business that morning. He had important letters to answer, and evidence to sift. He forced himself to use his ordinary intelligence, but it all seemed deadily unimportant compared to the trial for which he was bracing himself.

Beechfield was about fifteen miles from the city and they had to change trains to reach it. John was extraordinarily calm and cheerful now that the time had come, and they discussed their visit of the day before and his engagement to spend as much of the Thanksgiving holidays with Mrs. Wharton as he could. He told Mary of a new game he had heard about, which he was sure she would like, and Mrs. Wharton was so fond of games! Then they touched on the still brighter prospect of the Christmas holidays. Mrs. Brown had been forced to a somewhat shamefaced comparison of her own attitude toward Mary with Mrs. Wharton's whole-souled reception of her yesterday, and had given her a really cordial invitation to spend her two weeks of Christmas vacation with them. She had felt repaid when she saw the grateful color flood the girl's face and her eyes brighten; and with the impulse that one kind action gives toward another, she had kissed her with evident heartiness on saying good-bye.

As they boarded the second train, which had but a short distance to go, the cheery conversation dragged a little. Their eyes met and John had an odd sensation of panic, like a soldier who, marching bravely to the very guns of the enemy, suddenly feels all his courage gone and only the impulse to turn and flee. He talked faster and laughed at

things that were very mildly funny. His eyes avoided further meetings with Mary's as he helped her from the train and walked beside her to the house, which was well set back from the road in beautiful old-fashioned grounds. Two generations before it had been the country home of a local magnate, and was falling to decay from disuse when it had come into Miss Newlin's hands, fifteen years ago, at a merely nominal price, one-third of which was accepted in the form of a mortgage.

Through the wide-open front door Miss Newlin saw the oddly mated pair approaching and hastened forward to welcome them. After a warm embrace, she kept Mary's hand in hers, leading them thus from room to room, while the keen brown eyes studied them closely and her plain, strong face wore a singularly gentle expression. She pointed out all the places that were to be specially associated with Mary; her desk in the study and seats in dining-room and classrooms. She felt the girl's hand cold in hers and saw that her interest in her new home was by no means so keen as her guardian's. His long, observant eyes missed no detail in the once familiar rooms where the years had made few changes. The sadness of the old association was swallowed up in the interest of the new, and Miss Newlin shrewdly suspected that he would be able to conjure up a picture of Mary at every hour of the day. She might have added "and night too," for the room in which they ended their survey was the best known to him of all.

"Mary," Miss Newlin said as they entered the

rather bare, old-fashioned, but cheerful and homely chamber, where three windows let in the sunlight from early till late, "this room is the one that Mr. Brown's sister Margaret occupied for the whole three years that she was with me, and he thought it would please you to be here. You are to have the same bed too."

Mary colored deeply with pleased surprise, but John's eyes would not meet her eager ones and his lips warned her to say nothing. The room was longer than wide and duplicate articles of furniture were so arranged as to make it serve the purpose of two, with the help of a tall, folding screen, closed just now. The single beds stood at its opposite ends, and on the one nearest the door a half-dozen packages were temptingly set forth, while a bunch of autumn flowers stood on the dressing bureau near it. Mary looked without a smile at the parcels that would have thrilled her with excited curiosity at another time. Her play-acting was getting more and more faint-hearted, and the tears more and more insistent. She drew her hand from Miss Newlin's and went to the window. They could not see her face. Miss Newlin found herself wondering what was likely to follow John's exit.

"You'll have a busy time opening all these things, Mary," he said briskly, pulling out his watch. "I think I would better be leaving you to start to work; I haven't any too much time for my train, I see."

Mary turned sharply around, and though her eyes looked suspicious, she was on her mettle and

even tried to smile as she said decidedly, "I'm going to the station with you!"

"Oh, no, Mary," both her companions exclaimed at once, and both began to remonstrate; but they spoke to deaf ears. She went straight to John and seized his hand. "Oh, yes, I must," was all she said, but her face made them decide to oppose her no longer.

"Well, go down to the gate;" Miss Newlin said with a sympathetic thrill in her voice, "and I will wait for you on the piazza."

Mary deigned no reply, and they started off hand in hand by the short cut to the gate which Miss Newlin pointed out across the lawn and through the shrubberies. "I don't want a short cut," Mary said, yielding nevertheless to John's leading.

He talked to her quietly of several matters of business; told of some books that were to come for her in a day or two, etc. He saw that her eyes kept turning to his face, as though she marveled at his coolness, and was trying to decipher his real feeling amid so many commonplaces. He avoided them till he had nearly reached the gate, when he turned and looked straight down at her with an unfeigned light in his own.

"Now, Mary, run back and open the packages. There is something among them that I bought for you; that I had specially made for you, and I want very much to know how you like it. Write me this evening and tell me, won't you? Don't forget!" He did not say good-bye; he gave the hand he held a quick strong pressure, stooped and kissed her fore-

head with the cool, hurried touch of compressed lips, and was gone. He never looked back as he went quickly behind the old trees, stumbled down a low retaining wall that flanked part of the driveway and made blindly for the gate. It was of no use, all his common-sense and philosophy! He had climbed this first steep to the top, and the whole plain beyond was a desert waste! Suddenly he heard his name called, with a panting sob, close beside him. Mary was running straight toward him, her tear-wet face all one flushed entreaty. He sprang to her as she reached the wall, and then her wet cheek was against his and she was wrapped in a close embrace. The little wall leveled the difference in height between them, and for the first time they stood thus, face pressed to face, heart to heart. The old smoke tree seemed to bend further forward to screen them from impertinent glances of passers-by, but they were beyond caring for passers-by. John had forgotten his hardly maintained prudence, although it was he who first recalled himself.

"Help me to be brave, my dearest!" The broken words were wrung from his very heart and went right to Mary's as no considered phrase of consolation or appeal could possibly have done. She drew away at once and let him go without a word. The sense of utter desolation that a moment before had robbed her of the last remnant of self-control, was replaced by a wave of feeling so strong and sweet that the bitterness of the parting was gone. A happy tumult, a nameless unrest filled her heart; but it was quick to change from languor to resolve.

It was to be always thus with her; love of man or love to God were to be forthwith translated into action. It was a lonely figure that started back across the smooth green, but Miss Newlin, who came forward to meet her, saw the uplifted, resolute face, and felt that she was encountering an unsuspected force of character. The memory of Dick had been strong upon her as she waited, and in the look that met hers now she saw the selfsame traits that had made his face an unfading picture in her mental gallery.

"She has the same stuff in her, I believe," she said to herself, and it was a tribute to Mary that she offered none of the little condolences usually welcome to homesick schoolgirls. This one would be an absorbing study she decided. She drew Mary's hand through her arm and led her to a broad garden seat under a great beech worthy of its English sisters. "This was Margaret's favorite seat," she said, drawing Mary down beside her and launching at once into a glowing description of Margaret, her talents, traits of character, pastimes and favorite haunts; to all of which Mary listened with rapt attention.

"I think Mr. Brown had never been here since that old time, till he came to see me about you. It would have been painful to him, no doubt; but I am very glad he will have a reason for coming often now. He always interested me, though he was so reserved as a lad that I never got far with him." A suspicious tremor on the listening face warned her to change the subject for the present. She spoke in quite another tone, of practical questions

to be settled at once, and of the seamstress coming to-morrow to make some dresses for Mary. "I had some pretty materials sent out on approval, so you must take your choice and let the others go back to-morrow. Will you come in and look at them now?"

Mary obeyed willingly enough and showed a chastened interest in the materials and trimmings spread before her. "She is not vain," was Miss Newlin's surprised comment, as her new charge made quick choice of three dress-stuffs and then turned away with heightened color:

"I think I will open my parcels now," she said.

Her room was near the Principal's, but Miss Newlin did not go back with her. She dismissed her with an approving smile and pat on the shoulder which was somewhat higher than her own.

Mary was almost blinded by the level rays of the western sun as she opened the door of her room—the room that had been Margaret's for three years. For how many years would it be hers? Was it to be her home for always, perhaps? Something rose in her throat that was hard to swallow. The bareness of the roomy chamber was transfigured by the rays of the descending sun, and her eyes fell on the many tokens of loving thought for her comfort and pleasure; but the lump only grew bigger. She struggled hard against the aching sense of strangeness and loneliness. She drew her hand across her eyes in boyish fashion. The feel of John's arms around her, the sound of his parting words in her ear quieted the rising sobs. His need of her was real! He was lonely too! Surely he would not let her stay

there always; he would find a way to have her near him! She went quietly to work to untie the package nearest her. She wished John had told her which was his. The lid lifted from the big box showed a pretty wrapper of soft flannel with her favorite blue bows, to one of which was tied a little note in Catharine's tremulous handwriting. As she untied the string of the next in order, the lump in her throat was better and it seemed to grow still less as she looked at the crimson knitted garment which Mrs. Wharton's active fingers had made for her, and which in those days was called a "Jersey," though now it would receive the more euphonious name of "sweater." She smiled a tremulous little smile as she thought of this other good friend. And what was this big odd-looking bundle? It began to be rather exciting. Ah, this was it! That was John's writing on the note attached to some collapsible book-shelves, held at the corners by strong silk cord. He had had them made specially for her! She was more eager for the note than for the gift.

It told her that he had sent the box of her father's favorite books to Beechfield, and she could choose all she wanted for the shelves and let Miss Newlin store the rest. Her eyes were bright through tears as she said to herself "Oh, that is just like John; he knew how homelike they would make my room right away!" She must write him as soon as she unpacked her paper. She rose to do it at once, but something in the shape of the next parcel arrested her attention; it looked like a portfolio! Yes a corner of dark blue leather showed through the inner

wrapper as she discarded the thick outer one. Who could have given her that? Her interest was much less now, but curiosity was normal with her. She gave the paper a pull and lifted the leather cover, and then—she was gazing down into John's very eyes. They were so real and live that she drew a gasping astonished breath. There he sat just as he had sat that evening at Beach Haven when she had asked him for a picture and he had refused. It had hurt her so much and seemed so unlike him not to even give her a reason! And maybe all the time he had been planning this surprise! Even the left hand on the arm of the Morris chair was posed exactly as she had posed it then, and the right one held a book on his knee. The picture was three or four times the size of a cabinet photograph and was focussed near to the camera so that he seemed close to her, and the eyes were looking straight into hers with just the look they always had when he knew he was going to please her. She gazed and gazed till they were blotted out; then she sank on her knees beside the bed and laid her face upon her new treasure. It was not the cold, unresponsive celluloid that her hot cheek pressed, but the living, palpitating reality beneath it. Her eyes were open, but she did not see the golden glory all around her. It was only when the glory suddenly faded that she started, as with a new thought, and rose to her feet. Miss Newlin, who sat writing at her desk in her quiet room, was startled by the tempestuous opening of the door without any preceding knock. Mary's glowing face quite dazzled her and put all thought

of remonstrance out of her mind. Perhaps some day she should be able to make this child of nature conform to ordinary rules and conventions without being restive and unhappy, but now was not the time to begin.

"When does anyone go with the post, Miss Newlin?" inquired the uncereemonious visitor in a breathless voice.

Miss Newlin's eyes twinkled as they glanced at the little clock in front of her. "In about fifteen minutes," she said.

"Thank you." The door was shut again none too gently and she heard Mary's own close almost simultaneously. She smiled a knowing little smile.

"Someone will be reassured to-morrow morning, and I doubt whether he will have enough peace of mind to sleep before. How his heart is centered on the child! He has a tremendous influence over her. Will it be all he wants, I wonder?" she sighed. "If it is ever in my power to help you to your heart's desires, Mr. John Brown, you may count upon me. People would say I was a very unsafe guardian of young girls if they heard me," she ended with a rather sad smile, "and the difference in age is much too great, I know; but a man like that ought not to be wasted." Wasted, indeed, and she an old maid who considered herself a useful factor in the world!

Miss Newlin's fears for John's rest that night were not unfounded; but while he "dreed his wierd" till the small hours, and Catharine's tender heart could find no comfort, thinking of her darling "away off there in a strange bed crying herself to sleep and

no one to comfort her" (for had not Mary confessed to nightly tears even under the roof of her beloved "John?"); while even Mrs. Wharton lay awake far beyond her usual time, remembering the child who was making her start in life alone, the object of all their solicitude was sleeping soundly and contentedly, with a blue leather case under her pillow.

CHAPTER XXII

"THE LITTLE GREEN SNAKE" STINGS DEEPLY

THAT evening John managed to make a very creditable attempt at conversation during dinner, but he did not even deceive the sympathetic John Patterson, who remarked to Hannah in the privacy of the pantry that he thought "Mr. John was feelin' powerful bad. He didn't eat hardly a bite of his dinner," he said solemnly. "He just pretended, and he talked like company and looked absent-minded at the table-cloth or in his plate. It's a great pity we can't have more young life in this house. He's got old before his time and we haven't thought much about it, he's always so cheerful and contented. I never noticed it so much since Miss Margaret died as I have this summer, when I heard him laugh and make jokes with Miss Mary."

"Ah, I'm sure he's wishin' he could keep her for good," Hannah answered. "Maybe when she gets old enough he'll marry her." In Hannah's eyes all "Mr. John" would ever have to do would be to mention his desires to the chosen one. "The woman he marries 'll be as happy as a queen, but he never seems to take notice of anybody, and few ever come here except them that are old enough to be his mother."

John only gave a little grunt. "She's certain sure fond enough of him to do anything he wanted her to, but I s'pect it'll be a good while before she knows what that kind o' fondness means. She's a good deal like a child, for all she's so big and can talk so wise. I never heard such subjects as they'd get on sometimes."

"She's a loving nature," Hannah rejoined. "She's got to have somebody to pet her and make much of her. She put her two arms around me and kissed me when she was leavin', and says she, 'Hannah, I wish't you were goin' to be at the school,' she says. I declare I just had to wipe me eyes." Even in the telling of it Hannah's apron was again brought into play. "I can't bear to think of her bein' left all by herself in a strange school."

"Ay, ye may be sure that's what's frettin' Mr. John more than just missin' her. He's hardly thought of anything but her this whole blessed summer. It's a funny thing," he added with a little chuckle and a confidentially lowered voice. "Ye know I told ye about her gettin' him to eat rice puddin' and macaroni, and sayin' he liked 'em. Well, I declare, I don't think Mrs. Brown more'n half liked it when she saw him eatin' 'em."

Hannah evidently had ideas on this phase of the subject which she thought as well to keep to herself, but she looked pleased as well as amused over the conversion, and a soft little smile hovered about her kindly face as she went up stairs to "turn down the beds."

Meantime the object of their interest was under-

going a narrow, if covert, scrutiny under the eyes of his mother. She had spoken frankly and fully at table, of missing Mary, and had asked several questions as to the school arrangements, as to Mary's prospective room-mate, etc.; and had inquired whether Miss Newlin were failing in health as some people thought, and all through dinner had kept up what John Patterson called "company talk" on other subjects. But after she had been settled for some time on one side of the library table plying her needle, while John, on the other, was ostensibly absorbed in the evening paper, she was very quiet, and an expression of sorrowful determination gradually overspread her face. He was partly turned from her as though the better to catch the light over his shoulder, but from time to time he had put down his paper and gone to his den as though in search of something. She had refrained from comment, but she knew that he was not reading, let him turn the paper about as often as he would. Finally after a last excursion he broke the silence by an indifferent remark on the news of the day. His mother quietly put down her work and, going around the table behind him, laid one hand on his shoulder: "My dear boy, you trouble me," she said with an effort to clear her throat of some choking obstruction.

John quickly put up his hand and took hers from his shoulder, giving it a strong grasp and letting it drop. It was a mute prayer to be spared and Mrs. Brown partly understood it so; but she was a woman not easily turned from her purpose and her whole heart was in this one.

"I wouldn't say anything, dear, if I did not feel that you were probably storing up great unhappiness for yourself in the future." Not a sound; not the movement of a muscle. "I *must* warn you before it is too late."

Another silence; she could not see his face, but she had seen it many times this past week with an expression she could not forget. Finally, as she seemed willing to wait indefinitely, but was determined on some response, he said in an unnaturally quiet voice: "I am afraid it is too late now."

"Oh, no," she exclaimed vehemently, "it cannot be too late! Why, she is a mere child!" (She forgot that she had used the opposite argument a few days before.) "You are too strong a man to let yourself be conquered by this—weakness. Face it squarely and make your feeling for her what you will, no doubt, have to make it later. The longer you indulge this the harder it will be. Now you have simply got accustomed to having her about you and it is natural that you should miss her for a while; but that will pass, and—" He rose quickly and went to the open window, drawing aside the curtains and leaning his forehead against the high sash. "I am not strong," he said without looking around, "or if I am my strength is all on the wrong side."

Mrs. Brown hardly heeded his words, so eager was she to press home her own point.

"She is very fond of you, of course, but can't you see that she has no conception of—" she stumbled and hesitated. "She will be sure to have a very different feeling for somebody else in a few years

and then she will expect your sympathy and approval. I know I hurt you in speaking out so bluntly—I hurt myself, perhaps, just as much—but you don't understand women as well as I do, and it will break my heart if I see you spoiling your life for a castle in the air."

Her lips were trembling and the tears had long ago brimmed over. There was not a word from the motionless figure in the window. She stood with her hand on the back of his deserted chair; her eyes fixed piteously, irresolutely upon him. A sort of passionate resentment was rising within her against the disturber of their peace. She could not keep a note of sharpness out of her voice as she went on hurriedly; "she is beautiful enough even now to turn all the men's heads, and she will be a regular candle for the moths in a few years. And trust me, she will not be at all indifferent to admiration."

John turned suddenly and faced her from between the curtains; his white calm face towering above her.

"Mother, I know you are right and I shall try not to harbor any illusions. Mary"—his lips trembled as they uttered her name—"must never suspect my—feeling—for her. If she understood and were repelled, as no doubt she would be, it would make my work for her terribly hard. Don't you see?"

The memory of that close embrace, of her face pressed to his, was vivid to him. She had not understood even then; she had not made the slightest effort to disengage herself. He hardly knew whether her unconsciousness gave him more relief or pain.

"I shall try not to deceive myself," he went on unsteadily, "but she is a sacred trust to me and whatever happens, *I can never give her up.*"

"Oh, John!" The poor lady went back to her chair and took up her work as though it were the shroud of her dead happiness.

"You have seen that she is fond of me," he spoke in the same quiet voice. But suddenly self-control gave way and his face and voice showed a passion of which she had not believed him capable. "I would undergo anything rather than give up what I have. If I ever felt her shrink from me"—he broke off abruptly and in another moment he was gone. She heard the door of his room shut and knew that she should see him no more that night. Was the old happy life together gone forever?

Involuntarily her hands clenched with a feeling that was close to hatred for this girl of sixteen years who held him so completely in her power. After all, was John right in thinking that Mary would shrink from him? That had not been his mother's fear. She only resented the idea that this spoiled child might take all as her right and give nothing. For what would her grateful affection be to him if he must stand by and see her give her life into another man's keeping and—still more tragic possibility—see another man hold her happiness in his power and destroy it! What a task he had set himself! Never to confess his own love, for fear of losing the power to help her, and never to leave her that he might try to conquer it or forget it! His words rang in her ear. "*I can never give her up!*" In a sudden

illuminating flash she saw it all and knew that he saw it too.

John was down before her in the morning, very quiet and middle-aged after his night's vigil. He did not even glance at the little pile of letters beside his plate, but went straight to the garden and was busily engaged in tying up one of his favorite rose-bushes when John Patterson followed him with them. He glanced up inquiringly, a branch in one hand and a piece of twine in the other. It was unusual for John Patterson to depart from an established custom; but something in the face of his humble adorer arrested him. Was it possible? His sudden color asked the question; a spark somewhere in the back of John Patterson's blue eye answered it. He dropped the branch and held out his hand for the packet.

"Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes," John Patterson reminded him as he moved lingeringly away.

John's hand trembled as he went hastily through the bundle. There it was—the childish round hand, less assured and more childish than usual. She had written in great haste. He tore the envelope as he tried to open it, and the few penciled lines were indistinct to him. Then he pulled himself together and read them quietly, trying to profit by his mother's advice.

Oh, John, I could never tell you and even you could never guess! It is so wonderful and it makes me so happy! To think that it is my very own to keep forever and ever and take everywhere I go! It was almost the last parcel I opened—Oh, and I never opened the other! If I *could* love you any harder I would, after this, but you know I couldn't.

The note ended without valedictory or signature.

He went in to breakfast with a very serene face and met his mother's surprised glance with the simple statement that he had had a note from Mary and that she seemed quite satisfied and happy.

Mrs. Brown's eyes filled, but she only said that she was glad to hear it. The photograph for herself was still to be presented and John had rarely faced so much of an ordeal. Surely it ought to be easier after last night's confession, but it only showed another flagrant example of his weakness. The photograph was not just like Mary's, though he told himself that it was equally good. Perhaps it had been vanity as well as the wish to please her that had made him pose his hand for Mary and make the picture larger in consequence of giving her so much of his big person. This one was larger than ordinary cabinet size, but was only a vignetted bust likeness. It was an excellent one, however, and he felt sure that, the first little jealous pang over, his mother would be much pleased. She had gone into the library after breakfast, and had seated herself to take her usual glance over the *Ledger* before going about her housekeeping duties. John came over to her and put the picture in her lap without a word. He had many misgivings, but was quite unprepared for her reception of it. She took it up and, for what seemed to him an eternity, studied it with a perfectly immovable face. Suddenly it fell from her hands and her face was buried in them as she broke into hysterical weeping. Her reign was ended indeed!

CHAPTER XXIII

MARY WANTS TO BE "LIKE OTHER GIRLS"

AFTER the first week or two of orientation there was never any doubt of Mary's school life being happy. She was naturally of a buoyant, enthusiastic disposition, and there was a great deal to interest and stimulate her in her new world. The newness itself was a constant excitement, and the girls—their language, their habits and ideals, their complaints and criticisms, their little subterfuges and shirkings—aroused in her something of the same curiosity and interest that the ethnologist feels in coming upon a totally new tribe, while they, for their part, looked on her as an exotic who must be handled with care, and who, being under Miss Newlin's special wing and having the freedom of Miss Newlin's room, must be confided in with caution. They soon discovered, however, that nothing that Mary saw or heard was repeated at headquarters, and even among the lighter weights in the little community she became a favorite. Some were inclined to patronize her for her want of style and sophistication, but she did not even recognize patronage, and took it in perfectly good part, even accepting the loan of a lace collar and sash on the occasion of the first entertainment.

"Mary, dear," Ellen Logan said, putting her arm around her friend's waist; for they were already intimate and Mary accepted Ellen's advice on matters of social and school etiquette, "I know you won't mind my telling you, but if I were you, I wouldn't borrow things of the girls, and especially not of *those girls!*" She rather stumbled at that point, not knowing how to put into words, to this innocence, the subtle class-distinction that made "*those girls*" not *comme il faut*. She was not a snob, but had the prejudices of her class in the uncompromising form in which they are generally held by girls of seventeen or eighteen, only covered by admirable manners. Mary colored, but took the advice with wonderful meekness, being conscious of many solecisms and having made that resolve to learn to be "ladylike."

"I didn't care about them, for the lace in this collar isn't fine, and I don't like lace and embroidery much when they aren't fine; but they seemed so interested to have me look nice I was afraid I would hurt their feelings if I didn't take the things." Her voice was deprecating; almost humble.

Ellen, who was half a head shorter than Mary and very slenderly built, put her arms impulsively around her new friend and kissed her warmly. "You darling!" was all she said. Again the worldly-wise advice died on her lips and she felt ashamed of the comments she had been about to make. She would not even tell Mary that, homemade clothes and Miss Newlin's rather peculiar taste notwithstanding, she was a very princess beside her patronesses. All she finally said was: "Your face is so perfectly

lovely, Mary; no one will ever have time to look at your clothes."

Mary colored with pleasure, but made no deprecatory answer. "Girls will," she said simply, showing more astuteness than her friend had credited her with. Then she added with a fleeting smile, "I don't suppose John would ever know what I had on; but I can see that my things, even my new dresses, have a different look from yours. I don't know why exactly, but I don't think they are cut out the same way. Miss Lambert said they fitted me, and there aren't any wrinkles exactly"—she paused at a loss—"but your brown suit looks very different, and there isn't a bit of trimming on it."

"That suit was made by a tailor, and they do cut differently from women," Ellen said with some embarrassment. She had no idea of Mary's pecuniary status, and knew that the plain suit in question had probably cost twice as much as Mary's best one.

"Do you know Miss Caroline Hutchinson?" was the next surprising question, which did not seem irrelevant to Ellen.

"Yes, they are sort of cousins of ours, I don't know how, and we never see much of her because she is 'out' and very gay, but we always call her father 'Cousin James.' Do you know her?"

"No, I only saw her at the cricket match John took me to; but I think she is perfectly lovely looking and her clothes just seem as though they grew on her, and yet they weren't a bit tight."

"I know exactly what you mean, but Mother said once that Caroline spent a little fortune on her clothes.

Those simple-looking things are made by very expensive dressmakers and tailors and Mother thinks it bad taste for girls like us to spend a lot on clothes. Caroline has everything to accord, and dresses for every possible kind of time or weather. Cousin James is awfully rich—millions and millions—and he hasn't a soul in the world but her, and he gives her every single thing she wants and thousands of dollars of spending money. She isn't really a bit spoiled—that is, she isn't disagreeable. She's very affectionate, and nice to all the servants, and thoughtful of her father, but she has no idea about money. She wouldn't think anything of paying a hundred dollars for a white dress to wear in the morning and you'd only think how sweet and simple she looked."

Mary was petrified by these revelations. Some day she meant to speak to John about this absorbing question; but she saw him so seldom, and there was always so much to talk about, and somehow she was a little shy of financial questions. She was altogether a little shyer with him than in the summer.

On the first visit he had paid her, John had seized his courage and Mary with both hands and in spite of her wistful, wondering eyes, which broke their promise to Catharine, if her lips did not, had managed to say lightly, almost gaily, that he must not kiss her any more now that she was a "boarding-school young lady."

He had seen the brilliant, welcoming flush fade and give place to an unnatural stillness and pallor. The long, dark lashes hid her eyes. "Do you mean never?" The question had sounded breathless.

Did he? His pounding heart denied it while he said quietly, "I suppose I do."

She had taken it very quietly; so quietly that John marveled, and longed to read what was going on behind those lowered lids. But prudence had overcome curiosity.

* * * * *

"John," she said, on one of his visits, after she had received him with a very demure hand-shake and they had had a blissful half hour of companionship, "how much money ought I to spend on my clothes in a year?"

John looked as though the ground had suddenly opened in front of him.

"Why?" he said, after a very keen glance up and down her crimson stuff dress, with its white tucked silk "guimpe" and the bands of velvet that had seemed to Miss Newlin a very elegant little finishing touch. "Is there something you want?"

Mary colored deeply and her eyes fell. "No, nothing particular. Miss Newlin told me you wanted me to have all the things I needed and I was to choose what I liked, and they are very pretty, and good material, so they will wear well, she said"—she hesitated and her eyes were lifted appealingly to John's. It was so hard to explain to him.

"But the dresses don't quite satisfy you?"

"Oh, John!" Her face was flaming now and he saw the tears behind the darkness of her eyes. "You will think me so horrid and—and ungrateful for all your care, and—vain!" It was no use; the tears would come.

"Did I ever think anything unkind of you?" he asked very low.

She made a vehement protest and he went on with his grave eyes on hers. "I think I can understand anything you could feel. Try to tell me, as though I were—your father. It would—hurt me—to feel I was losing your confidence." Mary put her hand out impulsively and he took it and held it fast while she told him all. She ceased to blush or stammer as she saw the sympathetic interest in his face, and her frank eyes never wavered.

When the confidence was ended he released her hand and felt in an inner pocket for a thin Russia-leather note-book.

"John, I could tell you about *anything*! And you don't think me silly and vain," Mary said with no interrogation point; his face had reassured her.

"I don't think it is silly to prefer a skilful piece of work to a mediocre one, and it is always a good thing to know the difference, but"—his eyes were on the little book and his color had risen slightly—"I do think it would be silly to spend a great deal on clothes that were masterpieces when there are so many other things to spend it on, and when"—he gave her a glance more significant than he knew—"when it makes so little difference."

"Not to you, I know," she said, smiling a frank and very loving appreciation of his meaning; "but I should like to look like Ellen and the Coates girls, and——"

John interrupted her by an irrepressible little laugh, but he kept his dancing eyes on the account book and

drew out its pencil. He tore out a leaf and made a memorandum of several sums; then he turned to her with a gravity that was not forced.

"Mary, you have told me your story and now I will tell you mine. You are old enough and sensible enough to be given a full account of your father's affairs and your own prospects." And he went over the whole matter with her, giving her the amount of her father's property and the average income; and explaining the nature of his trust. "Anything you spend now is loaned from the estate before you are twenty-one, and I hope to make your property larger by at least two thousand dollars each year. After that"—he paused.

"But you will always help me, even when I am twenty-one, won't you?" Again the interrogation point was absent.

John's color was unsteady as he explained that Dick had left the money in his hands even after her majority. He saw intelligence in her face before she said gravely, "Father was afraid I would let somebody get it away from me." She had hit the nail fairly on the head at the first blow.

John blushed still more and hesitated.

"But I promised him I would never *marry* anybody unless you approved," she said impulsively, too much in earnest to blush, herself, or even to notice the change her words made in John. Every drop of color was gone from the face that bent over the little book. There was a long pause before he lifted it and said huskily: "That is a very heavy responsibility."

"Oh, no," she interrupted him eagerly, and added

with heightened color and that look of awaking womanhood he had lately seen in her eyes: "I should never like anybody unless he—" She was going to say "unless he were like you," but suddenly considered the improbability of anyone's being the least like John, and ended more quietly, "unless you liked him too."

She did not notice his face now, but a sure intuition told her that her marriage, whenever it came, and to whomsoever, would be a pain to John.

"Perhaps I shall never want to get married," she said quickly. "At any rate, not for a long, long while."

"Ah, you don't know yourself," John answered, but his face brightened. "I think I will put four hundred dollars in the bank for your yearly spending money and let you do your own managing. I will give you a check-book and show you how to keep it, and I need not know how you use it unless you overdraw."

"Oh, but John, I would never use so much as that!" she said with brilliant eyes.

"Wait till you begin ordering your stylish suits," he rejoined, laughing. But she was suddenly serious.

"Do you know, it seems as though I didn't care about them at all now," she said. "I never spent much money on anything, because I knew Father wasn't rich, and being sick costs a good deal; and he was always careful about expenses. He would have *wanted* to give me things if he thought I cared about them, but I really never thought much about clothes till I came to school."

When John was leaving he said with evident zest:

"I will take you to the city on your next holiday and introduce you at the 'Fidelity' and show you how to manage your own affairs; and later I will explain to you how your money is placed, even though I can't give you control of the capital!"

"I suppose Father was right about me," Mary said reflectively; "because I love people so *hard*. If you were to lose your money or need some for your work, I should like to give you every cent I had!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MISS NEWLIN'S DIPLOMACY

"DO you know, Mary, the postman has come to be the main interest in my days?" John had said on that first visit when he had declined to kiss her. He had had an undefined wish to make amends somehow and his little speech had succeeded beyond his hopes.

"But I mustn't let you write to me every day, now that you are studying," he went on hastily, in a more matter-of-fact tone. "And only two lines will content me when you do. Just write to me that you are well and happy, or let me know if you want something."

"Oh, but I love to write!" She had forgotten shyness and was looking earnestly at him. "The mail-bag goes down to the post office every night just before supper, and I always have some time to myself, because I can dress faster than Ellen. I might write on a whole lot of envelopes at once and keep them in my desk all stamped, and then I could go in the study and write for just ten or fifteen minutes by the clock before I go to my room every afternoon, and you would get the note next morning, as you did my first one." Her eyes and cheeks were bright with the prospect.

A sudden thought occurred to John. "How would it do if I had my name printed on a pile of stamped envelopes?" he said.

The idea had been welcomed enthusiastically, and the square envelope never failed of its place on the top of John's little breakfast pile, for John Patterson had early discovered the secret, and felt sure that that little four-by-five receptacle of no measurable thickness contained compressed sunshine for his master's whole day.

And so the weeks flew by, and the Thanksgiving vacation at Mrs. Wharton's had come and gone, leaving a beautiful reflection of full days and cosy evenings, when a student lamp shone on three happy faces (Mrs. Brown had declined the cordial invitation). Even the coveted Christmas holidays were only something to be treasured in the retrospect, as a time of sad memories shared, and in the sharing made a joy. They had left reminders more substantial, however, and John opened his watch-case oftener now than was needed to tell the time of day. Mary had repaid him for the pleasure his photograph had given her, by having a small one taken of herself and colored by the painting teacher at Beechfield. The light platinum print of her head and shoulders had been treated in a masterly manner by Mr. Reynolds, who contrived to give it a depth and charm worthy of his name, and so satisfactory to himself that only a robust sense of honor prevented his keeping a copy for his private delectation.

John had not attempted a word of thanks when he opened the little package that Mary had slipped

into his hands with her "Merry Christmas." He had given her one look and had gone out of the room, although they two were alone.

"Do you like it?" she had asked him softly when he came back. He had tried to answer her, but had completely choked, and his thanks had remained unspoken. He never told her, either, of having taken it from the pretty frame with which she had encircled it, and cut it to fit into his big watch. More than a year after, Mary asked him whether his watch was his father's. "No," he answered, looking oddly at her, as though he suspected her of clairvoyance. "My father sent to England for it for me the Christmas before he died."

"No wonder you love it!" she said with suffused eyes, marveling to see him turn red and look positively guilty.

Now it was only three weeks till Easter, which came late this year, and spring was awaking the whole earth day by day, bringing myriads of nesting song-birds, and making the girls by turns wild with exhilaration or languid with "spring fever."

Mary was to spend the Easter holidays with Ellen Logan in the country home on the banks of the Delaware, to which the family always migrated with the spring birds, and from which they reluctantly returned with the first snows. She was a good deal changed by the winter of school life, yet there was very little outward alteration. The childish way of wearing her hair in a "pump-handle" gave her a simplicity which the more mature carriage and manner did not destroy.

"Don't let them interfere with your hair!" John had besought her, and she had quietly resisted all efforts to make her change her style of arrangement. Most of them had to acknowledge that it became her well. In spite of great possibilities of brightness, her face had a gravity and her eyes a deep thoughtfulness quite different from the sadness of depression or discontent to be seen occasionally on some of the youthful faces about her. Her religious life, so vital a factor in her development, was of a kind to isolate her from her companions so far as confidential relations were concerned. They had nearly all been received by confirmation or other ceremony into some spiritual fold; and many of them were earnest Christian girls, with a serious purpose in life, while nearly all accepted the traditions of their fathers without a qualm or question. But Mary instinctively knew that they could not have fully sympathized with her; that even Ellen, who was a very intelligent girl of noble character and deeply religious temper, had been unable to see the weight of the obstacles that kept Mary a church waif; and the sensitive nature retired more into itself and submitted to be tacitly regarded by the others as peculiar, if not slightly tainted with heresy. When she had called herself a Friend, accepting John's classification as a sort of haven for her wistful spirit, she had at once been met with the question, "Orthodox or Hicksite?" and had been quite at a loss how to reply. Even among Friends one must be classified according to doctrine, it seemed. How could the "Inward Light" on which both depended, the "Christ Within" one

soul, be totally at variance with the "Christ Within" another? The question troubled her, as it could only have troubled a straightforward, intensely earnest nature. After all, could one depend on that "Inward Light?"

She spoke of her doubt to Miss Newlin when, by virtue of her privileged position, she had been curled up in the corner of the Principal's sofa one blustery afternoon, when March seemed doing his best to "go out as a lion." That lady was busy with a thick sheaf of history-class papers, but met the interruption with a smile. "I wondered what you were dreaming about," she said. "My dear child, I am a great sceptic as to the 'Christ Within.' I believe in it theoretically, of course, as everyone does, to a certain extent; but unless you can get perfectly pure hearts to contain Him, the image must be a more or less marred one. Only an immaculate shrine could enclose an *infallible* 'Inward Light.' I think the Friends have 'hitched their wagon to a star' with a vengeance, and I have known some saints among them who did seem to me to come very close to unerring communion with their Father in Heaven, but a good many have surely been woefully misguided."

"But what *can* we depend on?" Mary asked, her lustrous eyes darkly shadowed. "We might try to find someone good enough to have a perfect 'Inward Light,' and ask him what to think or do."

"I think we are justified in doing that up to a certain point, but it seems as though God had not meant us to have anything infallible to lean upon,

whether Pope, or Church, or Bible. All have their place, but none is perfect, and it is dangerous to depend too much on any human being's guidance. Even Christ felt it 'expedient' to go away."

"But he promised to send 'the Comforter to guide us into all truth.' I believe that as firmly as anything. It seems to me John is about perfect and yet I can't join the Church and say the catechism and Creed because he does. He wouldn't let me if I wanted to."

"He is right," Miss Newlin said promptly. "I think, dear, you are one of those souls to whom God speaks in no uncertain language. You are absolutely honest to yourself as well as to other people, and it is a rare quality. It means much that I am not afraid of saying this to you."

A wave of gratified feeling sent a warm glow over Mary's face and suffused her eyes. She said nothing and there was a long silence while Miss Newlin put the papers into a side drawer of the desk and leaned back in her chair as though tired out.

"But people help me a great deal," Mary finally went on. "Sometimes God seems far off, and when I read the Bible—because I know Christ is just the same as God—He seems far off too. They had such different ways of doing, off there, and so long ago!" Miss Newlin nodded her head slightly, her eyes fixed broodingly on the face of the "Gran Duca" Madonna above her desk.

"Sometimes I feel very near to Jesus and I seem to understand him perfectly—when he takes the little children in his arms and when he calls the

Pharisees names; but then when he says to his mother, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' and when he drowns all those poor swine that must have belonged to *somebody*, I suppose, and had nothing to do with making the man crazy; or when he curses the fig tree for not bearing, when it says in one place that the '*time* for bearing was not yet,' he seems to get far away and the Christ *in me* tells me differently. Only I always wonder if they really got it down just right."

Miss Newlin looked over at her with a tender little smile. She saw there was no flippancy or irreverence in the comment, and the problem was a painful one to the loving heart. "You are a wonderful child," she said, but she said it to herself.

"But then," Mary continued, in a totally different tone, "I just remember God made Father and John, so I know I love Him. He wouldn't have known how to make them have such ways if He hadn't had them Himself, would He?"

"You are using one of the great arguments of a certain school of thought, and I believe it is as true as it is simple. The watch presupposes the watch-maker," Miss Newlin answered with conviction. "You have been favored with two unusual patterns," she added gently.

Mary's face was softly pensive for a moment, then a sudden, complete change crossed it. "Miss Newlin, do you know Maud Harvey asked me to-day how I would like it if John got married. She said, 'he wouldn't be sending me things and writing to me so often if he had a wife and children to look

after!' As if *John* would ever get married! He never thinks of such a thing."

"Indeed, I hope and believe he *will* marry, one of these days. He is a magnificent man and I should feel very sorry to think he was not to have the experience of being a husband and father. It would be a great loss to some fine woman and to the whole community." Her observant brown eyes were taking careful, though covert, note of the sudden blank change in Mary's guileless face.

"But he *told* me he was never going to," Mary said falteringly.

"That is one statement it is never safe to believe, even from the most truthful person in the world. But *you* will never be slighted, Mary. Married or single, Mr. Brown is not the man to neglect his trusts; and he is too fond of you to forget you."

"I think I put in a solid piece of work for you then, Mr. John Brown," she added to herself. Then, after a prolonged silence in which she seemed to find a sudden absorbing interest in some memoranda, she saw Mary quietly put down her book and leave the room.

CHAPTER XXV

MARY FIGHTS THE "LITTLE GREEN SNAKE"

"**W**HAT'S the matter, Mary?" Ellen met her friend coming hastily out of their room decked in Mrs. Wharton's crimson jersey, and a more recent gift of a "Tam o'Shanter" to match, and drawing on her warm gloves with feverish energy; while her cheeks were brilliant and her eyes— It seems to have been settled from time out of mind that eyes shine "like stars"; consequently, though we may never have happened to see an eye the least bit like a star, we must perforce express ourselves in the language of comparison best fitted to convey our meaning, even though it do violence to our love of truth; and I am thus constrained to record that Mary's eyes were "shining like stars."

"Oh, nothing," she answered hurriedly. "Only the house seems so stuffy and the wind isn't so high now; it's getting nicer out of doors."

Ellen said no more, but she stood in the doorway a moment looking after the retreating figure with a thoughtful face. Even the very slight prevarication was not like Mary's usual openness. "I am sure someone has hurt her feelings or made her angry," she said to herself.

It was Mary's habit to smooth her ruffled plumage by an escape out of doors when it was feasible; but she always was willing to confide other than religious troubles to her room-mate. This time she would really have been at a loss to say what the matter was. She had not put it into words and was far from analyzing the pain and excitement she felt. She *almost* thought that she was thinking only of the value of fresh air.

The cold, blustering wind was in fact dying down somewhat and the sun was sending golden beams from time to time between the flying cloud masses that quenched them just as they began to shed a steady radiance. A little song sparrow on a bare branch over Mary's head seemed bursting with rapture over his spring housekeeping and nothing daunted by March's lion-like exit. She looked up at him, but his happy little warble hurt her. The wind cooled her hot cheeks, but she was only half conscious of it. The ground was beginning to freeze again after the frost had been well out; and she watched it idly as it yielded grudgingly under her stout shoes. Then she raised her head and looked across the broad lawn which a week of mild sunshine had made a fine emerald. It was literally strewn with robins trotting about, intent on their suppers. Here and there one tugged at a refractory worm that the freezing ground was loath to give up.

In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast.

The words were fresh in her mind from a recent reading of the poem with Miss Newlin. "Miss New-

lin says these aren't the same kind of robins," she said as though to convince herself that her mind was occupied only with what was before her eyes. But the name recalled a still more recent utterance of Miss Newlin's and her telltale face quivered as her mind flew on to the concluding line of the verse. "But John isn't a young man!" The stifled feeling would push forth at last and put itself into words. It would be denied no longer. Miss Newlin didn't understand. John wasn't that kind of a man! "I hope and *believe*," the words rang clear in her brain. Ought she, too, to hope if she loved him? Oh, but he didn't *want* to get married! She knew he didn't! Hadn't he said he would have a "better time" looking after her? A host of thronging memories came over her. She had entered the garden mechanically and was walking beside the neat border from which the men had lately removed the winter litter. The damp brown earth had been raked over, and there, beyond, the first plantings of peas and onion-sets were marked by large white labels at the ends of the rows, and the whole vegetable garden had been plowed and harrowed.

"If it freezes hard it'll just be to do over, I'm afraid," Patrick, the head-gardener, and her good friend, had said to her the day before, referring to the neat enclosure, while she had watched him pruning the hardy roses. John had written her that he had spent an afternoon pruning and working over his, and her heart had been full of warmth and gladness as she chatted with the responsive Irishman whose eyes looked at her with the open admiration

he would have bestowed on a rare orchid or an extra fine melon. The sight of those stubby bushes made a lump rise in her throat. What a baby she was to be fretting over a ridiculous speech! Her respect for Miss Newlin tottered for the moment. She wanted John to have every good thing in the world! (The lump would not be scolded away.) But he didn't know any women, "except older ones." A sudden flash of memory brought Miss Emma Raymond to her mind, and John's gentle, pleased expression as he explained some cricketing practice to her. He had looked so happy that day and he hadn't sat by her (Mary) once, even in the train. The thought made her stop stock-still in the middle of the path. Her very breathing was checked. A tight, strained feeling made her throat ache. She tried to banish the idea indignantly as she started briskly on. "*Miss Emma Raymond!*"

She had reached a sheltered corner made by the angle of a high brick wall and splendid hemlock hedge. In the little nook the ground was thickly bordered with purple and white crocuses, while here and there a more timid yellow one pushed up his head, and further around the turn there was a lovely clump of blue squills. She stooped to gather a few of the dainty little flowers, but surprised herself by watering them with two or three hot tears.

Some other girls were tempted out of the house by the brighter weather; she was not going to meet them! She hurried out of the garden by the opposite way and struck straight across the fresh spring grass of the lawn toward the front of the house. Never

since her father's death had she felt so lonely. John had seemed her property—her spiritual property at least—for his mother had by far the lion's share of his bodily presence. But she felt his thoughts with her every day. "He understood all her feelings and they thought alike on almost everything." Miss Newlin's assurance that she would never be set aside or neglected was "Job's comfort." A vision of the intimacy of married life, as she knew it from books (poor child, she had seen nothing of it in real life, either to confirm or banish her ideal), rose before her mind's eye. Married people were always together and told each other everything, and when one felt badly the other was always at hand to comfort or encourage.

She had reached the stretch of greensward across which she and John had walked that first day, and as she came toward the drive, the sight of the little retaining wall made her feel John's arms again around her, his thin cheek against hers. She pressed her clumsily gloved hands against her bosom as though to still the pain there. It was as real and physical a thing as a "stitch" in one's side. "Would John ever hold anyone else like that? Would someone else be the 'dearest' to him?" She was no longer crying. Pride checked the tears and made her try again to swallow that choking lump. She was so utterly forlorn. She did not really belong to anyone. Even to put her head in Catharine's lap would bring no comfort for this ache.

Ever since her appearance in court, with its unveiling of the seamy side of child life and the brutal-

ity possible to human nature, a fixed purpose had been forming in her mind to settle herself somewhere near John, when school days were over—if his mother did not ask her to come there to live, as she always privately hoped—and to be his helper in the work of bettering conditions for the little helpless creatures. She had often spoken to John of this intention, in her daily letters. Then she saw him, which was not often, the present generally filled her mind. She never spoke of her hope of his mother's invitation. She felt that a delicate matter and one that might make him sorry if it should be unfulfilled; but she looked on the partnership as a settled thing; and in her earnest heart it was gradually crowding out the half-formed maiden dreams of the year before. *Marriage* was less alluring as a castle in the air than this philanthropic life, working every day with John. An adapted King Arthur in up-to-date tailored garb was fading away, and the brothers and cousins of the girls to whom she was presented from time to time seemed much less romantic and more ordinary than even Jack Wurts, who had added considerably to her prestige, all unknown to herself, by two visits and an invitation to the Yale Commencement festivities (where his mother was to chaperone her), not to speak of many offerings of sweets, organic and inorganic.

The girls liked her all the better, perhaps, when they found that she was by no means a belle at the little school entertainments where boys were admitted. The modern young man of twenty cares much less for beauty than his father or grandfather did, and Mary could not dance and had declined to be taught

yet, saying that she did not feel like dancing, but that she meant to learn some day.

The girls could not be made to remember her recent bereavement, since she wore no mourning to recall it to their minds; and few of them understood that she had 'that within which passeth show.' Even Ellen, who knew her deep feeling for her father, looked on the wearing of everyday, colored clothes as an unfortunate eccentricity. "Nobody understands it," she argued to herself.

Mary's breaking of rules, which Catharine and Miss Newlin had both feared, had turned out more a bogey than a reality. She was maturing very fast, and that purpose of pleasing Mrs. Brown by being "ladylike" which she confided to no one but Catharine, had prevented many lawless, if harmless, escapades, while her sense of honor had never been appealed to in vain. When she reached the gate now, the force of already formed habit made her stop and turn about, in spite of the turmoil within her.

The sinking sun was drawing the wind down after it, as one draws in a kite; and the scudding clouds of a half hour ago were a dull canopy on the eastern sky, while all the air to westward was flooded with ethereal gold that glorified each commonest object. Mary was suddenly recalled to the present and the near departure of the mail bag. She glanced hastily at the little silver watch tucked in the bosom of her dress and quickened her pace. "I hardly have any time at all, even if I get ready for supper in five minutes," she said to herself contritely. She had

never once forgotten her little evening bulletin nor her longer Sunday letter. She felt a sensation of panic as she raised her desk lid and drew out one of the familiar envelopes and a tablet.

DEAR JOHN—

The unwonted conventional beginning stood alone for one anxious minute. Her eyes watched the busy second-hand travel round his little circle in the big circle of the clock face, then she made a desperate plunge.

Do you see Miss Emma Raymond often? When you do, will you remember me to her?

Why had she written that? She didn't really care! Her chin sank into the hollow of her hand, while her eyes were bent moodily on the few lines to which it seemed impossible to add a word. Suddenly she raised them to the clock face again, and this time it sent the blood back to her heart.

I got to thinking and my time is all gone.

An odd letter to send, but there was no time to better it. She folded it awry, pushed it into the waiting envelope and left the room.

John gazed bewildered at the little scrawl next morning. "You ought to send Miss Mary an 'April Fool,'" John Patterson had said to him the day before, and here was an "April Fool," indeed. What did it mean? There was no sign of a joke about it, and John took himself to task for feeling hurt as well as

disappointed. He would not be childish! He and Mary understood each other too well ever to take offense. The next day's letter would explain; but in spite of himself, he felt that Mary had somehow put a barrier between them, and he could not rest till it was gone.

As he was strolling down Chestnut Street toward his office, at a pace very different from his usual long, energetic stride, and with his eyes on the pavement, a voice suddenly fitted so aptly into his reverie that he started and answered Miss Raymond's greeting with evident self-consciousness. At sight of his heightened color, Miss Emma's heart went all of a flutter, and as he turned and walked back with her for a short distance, her manner became even more primly tremulous than its wont. When he left her with a genial smile and a brisk "Wednesday afternoon, then," she was not to be blamed that she forgot a commission for Elsie and chose quite the wrong shade of wool for her own knitting.

John, for his part, went very calmly on to the office and sat down to write to his ward.

MY DEAR MARY:—I met Miss Raymond just after receiving your *shabby* little letter, and I gave her your message, which evidently pleased her very much. She said she had thought of you often and would like exceedingly to go out to see you. I told her I would be glad to take her out next Wednesday if it suited you.

The rest of the letter was taken up with the usual friendly intimate talk. He would not question her. There was probably nothing wrong. It was only that she had been occupied and had forgotten the

flight of time. "It is wonderful that she has never once overlooked the time in all these months!" He took her letter out again and looked at it as though he expected to find some explanation hidden in it. The prim "Dear John," standing alone on its line, absolutely contradicted his theory of forgetfulness and haste. He never knew her to waste precious time on titles and addresses. "I got to thinking." That had not happened before, either. Her writing was much improved and her facility had made the letters longer of late, while they always bore witness to more matter than could be crowded comfortably into the time.

He sighed deeply as he put this puzzling one with the others into a locked drawer. Only a few were carried always in the thin wallet which was warmed by his active heart by day and his pillowed head by night. "She has spoiled me," he thought. "I must not expect her confidence in every little thing. There always comes a time when a girl begins to keep her own council." He did not know how close he had come to the solving of the case in hand, and any suspicion of the actual truth would have seemed too absurd for belief.

The Sunday letter was very different from usual and much shorter. There was a wistful, even a pathetic, note in it, though the wording was commonplace enough and the answer to his suggestion of bringing Miss Emma was very cordial.

Tuesday and Wednesday morning's notes were even more unsatisfying, and he was burning to see her and try to solve the riddle from her face. He

had stuck to his resolve not to go often to see her. It had been nearly four weeks since his last visit, and he felt that he deserved much credit for unselfishly sharing this one with Miss Raymond.

Mary was at the station to meet them, in a new tailor-made suit of gray homespun that became her wonderfully, and made her look like a young lady and a fashionable one. The close-fitting basque, buttoned down the front with no adornment, showed to perfection the graceful lines of her half-developed, girlish figure, which was larger in the waist than was at that time popular with young girls. She had been guided in her toilet by her own native good sense and Ellen's wise example, and the result gave John a shock as she came forward to meet them, and made his heart beat uncomfortably fast. No wonder the letters were different! His greeting was quieter than usual and he fell back and let the two walk ahead of him up the path to the gate.

Miss Raymond thought Mary in fine spirits, her cheeks were so bright and her eyes so lustrous as she pointed out each object of interest and gave accounts of their daily doings with a volubility which left her listener no more than time for "Yes" or "No." Inside the gate they met Miss Newlin in grave consultation with Patrick, but she broke off and came forward at once with the cordial smile she always had for John. Mary presented Miss Raymond, and as the two ladies fell into an interchange of polite commonplaces (for Miss Newlin kept a stock of these on hand for certain occasions) and Miss Emma modestly recalled to her memory a previous

meeting, John turned to Mary and compelled her eyes to meet his for the first time. "Yes, there was something very much amiss."

"We look very nice in our new spring clothes," he said, smiling as he looked her up and down from the blue bow at her throat where the basque was slightly cut away to the neatly but sensibly shod feet.

She answered the smile with even heightened color. "It cost too much, I'm afraid," she said, her old habit of confidence stronger than any new reserve. "Sixty-five dollars!" looking at him to see the effect of the shocking intelligence.

"But it will wear a long time and clean well. There is no more serviceable material. Only you must try not to outgrow it." He was watching her face narrowly under cover of his bright smile.

"Outgrow it!" she exclaimed with a touch of offended dignity. "Why, I've been done growing for ever so long!"

"Have you?" he asked absently.

Miss Newlin had moved on toward the house with her companion, but John did not notice. The line of his lips was straight now, as he stood gazing into Mary's eyes with a yearning effort to read what he saw there. He seemed to hold them against her will until he forced slow tears up from their depths. She turned quickly from him to follow the others, but he caught her hand and held it fast.

"Mary, there is something wrong with you. Can't you tell me?" he asked as he allowed her to move on slowly in spite of her evident haste to break from

him. No answer. Her face was half turned away, but he saw it quiver. He loosed the hand.

"Forgive me. I won't tease you," he said in a constrained voice; but she turned quickly at the sound and saw his face. It made an instant change in hers.

She came back to him at once and clasped her fingers around his dejectedly hanging ones, which responded with the suddenness of electricity. They were passing the very spot so vivid in both their memories. Each knew that the other was remembering what seemed ages ago and of a past and gone epoch in their lives.

"John," Mary said, in her old headlong fashion, crimsoning to the roots of her hair, "there *was* something the matter, but it was silly. I don't mind it now, really. I'm not going to think about it again."

It was spoken with conviction, but John was not quite satisfied. "Nothing is silly if it can trouble you," he said; but seeing her agitation, he forbore further questions in spite of his intense wish to know.

At that moment Miss Emma turned to speak to Mary and her eyes fell on a picture that she had seen once before on the city street; but Mary was rose-red and John's face was grave and bore a look of ill concealed annoyance at the interruption.

Miss Newlin gave them a very keen glance. "What a child she is!" she said to herself with a smile and half suppressed sigh.

The visit was not a very long one, and John had no chance for a word with Mary alone till, having helped Miss Raymond up the steps of the car, he lingered one moment before the train moved off.

"Mary, you are not offended with *me?*" he asked in a low, hurried voice.

She looked up quickly and read the pain her reticence was giving him.

"Oh, no!" she said as she drew back while the train started and John swung himself up by the railing. "I—" he was waiting on the lowest step as he was carried slowly from her. "I was just *jealous!*" The impetuous words seemed torn from her as she felt her chance for an understanding disappear. Then she turned and fled without one backward look.

Miss Emma, who was trying in vain to attract her attention through the car window, and waving an energetic but wasted good-bye, turned back as John took his seat beside her and glanced curiously up at his face. He looked as though he had dropped from the clouds, but apparently he had dropped on his feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS NEWLIN'S DIPLOMACY *Almost* FAILS

JOHN found himself in much the state of mind of the man who, consumed with curiosity to know how his fellow traveler lost a leg, is promised the desired information on condition that he ask no further question and is tersely told that "it was *bit* off." But John had the advantage, in so far that he had made no promises, and had only the "inordinate slowness" of the United States mail service (or so he hoped) between him and enlightenment.

As he talked with moderate intelligence to Miss Emma, his mind was repeating the words of that first singular note. Needless to say, he knew it by heart, with every comma and pause; but the connection of ideas was too incredible and bewildering. He would not let himself think it out, but his heart performed antics in the next few days which would have astonished those who saw him going steadily about his business.

He wrote a few lines to Mary that evening and posted them himself.

Write to me soon and tell me what you meant to-day, and of whom or what you could possibly be "*jealous*." I feel I must have misunderstood the word, yet, surely, that was what you said. I cannot write more till I hear from you.

He was not surprised at the absence of the well-known envelope next morning, but he seized it eagerly the following day. She had got his note and it had pleased her; he could read that between the lines, and she confessed to having been very silly, but very unhappy.

I will write you a long letter on Sunday. I couldn't tell you in a little time. Now I have let you know what a baby I am, I must go on and explain.

So John tried to possess his soul in patience and finally reduced his temperature a degree or two by recalling a small boy of seven who had been romantically devoted to Margaret at eighteen, and had really made himself ill with jealousy of her grown-up admirers. He opened the thick letter when it came with studied deliberation, but his hands would tremble. They grew quiet as he read. Mary told him of Maud Harvey's suggestion and her own rejection of the idea; of Miss Newlin's extraordinary words and the feeling they had roused in her.

She said she "*believed* you would marry" and she meant it too!

John was too much astonished at this prophecy to go on at once with his reading. His mind was trying to discover Miss Newlin's grounds for such a speech.

I ask God in all my prayers to give you every blessing *possible*, but when I thought that getting married was one, and when I remembered that you seemed to like Miss Emma very much, I *tried* to pray for it, if you really wanted it, but I couldn't.

I felt sure God would not want me to say something when he could see into my heart and know I was praying for what I didn't honestly want to happen; so I haven't mentioned your name lately. I have only prayed with all my might to be unselfish. But when I got your note and you seemed so surprised, I knew there was a mistake. I felt it even before you went away on Wednesday, for you looked at me so sorrowfully, and oh! you don't know what a difference it made to me.

I think so much about that space in your office where you said I could have my desk, and how I can hunt up things for you out of your law books and make notes for you, and do hundreds of little things; and I get so happy thinking about it, and anxious for the time to come, I can hardly wait. Do you really think I must keep on studying at school till I am twenty? I would rather study law—at least, enough to be a real help to you—and I study all my lessons with reference to the help they can be to us in our work later on.

But if you were married it would be all different. You would always be hurrying to get away to your wife, and, oh, John! Miss Emma isn't nearly good enough for you, and she is too old. I dare to say it now because I am sure you don't love her. *Nobody* is nice enough for you! Couldn't we promise we would neither of us ever get married, but just always work together and try to make the world better? We have a patriotic club here now, and we are all going to do something for the United States when we can. Oh, I wrote you that before!

I used to think I would want to get married, but the older I get the less I care about it and the more I long to really go to work with you.

John had come home from his office very early, being disappointed of his expected letter in the lunch-time delivery, and knowing his mother to be engaged for the afternoon. He had met the postman at the door and retired promptly to his den with his treasure. How many times he read it over we need not inquire, but certain it is that three separate,

closely written letters found their way to the fire and his mother's entrance prevented the beginning of a fourth.

In spite of his efforts to talk that evening, she found him preoccupied; but whatever might be on his mind, she decided, on glancing often at his abstracted face, that it was nothing painful or worrying. When she drew out her watch and wound it at half-past nine, John knew that his time had come; and bidding her an affectionate good-night at the foot of the stairs, betook himself again to his sanctum. His head rested on his hands for many minutes before he wrote the following short note:

MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL:—I thank you more than I can say for your frank and full explanation. It seems extraordinary that you who know me could imagine that Miss Emma Raymond, or anyone else of my choosing, could ever come between you and me. We need make no promises, for I shall not change, and you are too young to know what you will feel one day. Give me all the help and companionship and love you can without robbing someone else, when that time comes; but never doubt again that I shall be always and altogether and only yours.
J. B.

He went out and posted the formal little note before giving himself time to reconsider.

Thus with a few pen-strokes did he undo all Miss Newlin's neat work. Well, perhaps not quite all.

CHAPTER XXVII

TELLING HOW JOHN CAME TO BE INVITED TO A BIRTHDAY PARTY

AFTER all the confusion and bustle of packing and leave-taking, of buying of tickets and checking of trunks, Mary found herself sitting beside Ellen in the Bristol train on the way to the first visit of her life among people of her own age. John had met them at Broad Street Station and transferred them from one train to the other with the brightest of faces and most cordial good wishes for their holiday. Mary herself was full of anticipation and sure of a "good time." She had met Ellen's mother several times during the term and they were already good friends; and she had seen her elder brother and two young sisters. She would not feel strange in that cordial, happy circle; but as she pressed her face to the window pane of the moving car and caught a last glimpse of John; as she saw his waving hat fall listlessly at his side while the smile faded out of his face, a quick pang of something like homesickness shot through her. Ellen knew what was passing in her mind and hastened to say in an unobservant, matter-of-fact voice, as she readjusted her hand-bag beside her feet, "I just love your guardian, Mary, and I do wish Mother and

Father could meet him. Don't you think he would come out to dinner with us one night? If we only had two Sundays we could ask him for one, but of course he has his own plans for Easter."

Mary's pleased face at once rewarded the kind impulse and made it a fixed purpose.

"I wonder if he would care to come for my birthday party," Ellen mused aloud. She was to celebrate her eighteenth birthday the Tuesday in Easter week, though the anniversary itself fell on the Monday. But her cousin, Philip Dillwyn, whose holidays were all spent with the Logan household, came of age on Wednesday, and so they had compromised on a double celebration of a modest sort on Tuesday. Ellen knew that a large party would have been painful to Mary, and with the unselfish tact which was her strongest trait, she had written her mother of her wish to have just an informal good time and not a dinner-party or dance. They were to have a double cake with candles on top and all the orthodox symbolic things inside, and they were to have all the jokes and toasts and games they could think of, "but nothing formal."

"Oh, Ellen, wouldn't it be perfect if he *would* come," Mary said excitedly. "But he never goes anywhere," she added, with a sudden quieting afterthought.

"I think he would go anywhere and everywhere to see you," Ellen answered with an arch little smile that was quite frank. Like everyone who saw John in his ward's company, she had an intuition that his love for Mary was not purely paternal, and she

felt the common stirring of regret and sympathy, but considered him quite out of the question in any other rôle than that which he filled at present. Mary was far too beautiful and had too interesting a future before her ever to marry a man of her father's age, and a sort of philanthropic recluse into the bargain. Yet, Ellen had told the simple truth when she said "she just loved him."

Philip Dillwyn was on the platform as the train drew up, and instantly possessed himself of their bags with only a hasty, if interested, acknowledgment of Ellen's introduction to her friend. He had no time for handshakes; he scarcely touched his cap, so eager was he to be serviceable.

"Edward is in the cart," he explained to Ellen; then seeing her about to be waylaid by a gushing girl acquaintance, he moved on through the little station with Mary. They made a very handsome pair, for Philip was as perfect a specimen of masculine beauty as Mary of feminine. They had heard much of each other, but this was their first meeting, and they were too full of mutual curiosity and interest even to be self-conscious. Philip was always conscious of himself, as one who was secure of pleasing. He knew he had only to smile to call forth an answering smile; and in girls of Mary's age it was always accompanied by a blush or preening of coquette feathers. Mary blushed, it is true, but the frank, clear gaze that met his as she fell readily into conversation with him was quite different from the glances he was used to. He felt aroused and stimulated in a moment. Edward did not get off his high perch

on the driver's seat as the two came out the back door of the station close beside him. He was not over-gallant, and "she had Philip to boost her up and put in the bags."

He had grudgingly agreed with Ellen, on his first visit to the school, that Mary was "pretty good-looking," but he rather scorned pretty girls and considered his sister "Nell," who was no beauty, worth a dozen of them.

He scanned the visitor closely as he raised his hat and smiled a polite welcome; and then asked if she cared to come in front with him. "Oh, no," she said calmly, showing what even Edward considered "nice" dimples. "Ellen will want to sit with you." He gave her a rather surprised glance, but said nothing; and at that moment Ellen joined them. The brother and sister were enough alike to seem circumstantial evidence of the personal appearance of at least one parent. They were both undersized and colorless as to hair, skin and eyes; and the daintiness of Ellen's physical make-up would have leaned to insignificance in him, but for an expression of strong intelligence and purpose. They greeted each other without effusion, but it would not have taken a close observer to see that they were as congenial in mind as they were alike in body; and Ellen's pleased acknowledgment of Mary's modestly mounting to the back seat showed how much she enjoyed the prospect of her brother's neighborhood on the mile or more of drive to the house.

Mrs. Logan and the younger girls, Priscilla and Sophie, were watching for the cart, and received Ellen

with a jubilant demonstration, while they were exceedingly cordial to Mary. But it was not till dinner-time that she was introduced to her host—a punctiliously courteous, very retiring man, who left the helm of the household ship absolutely in the hands of his wife, in return for a larger share of his own sweet will than falls to the lot of most men. He was tall and lean, with black hair and moustache, an aquiline nose and prominent cheek bones. He gave two fingers of an exquisitely formed hand to Mary to shake, and she went through that ceremony with a sort of trepidation, as though she had been given a rare vase to hold; but his bright, dark eyes had a twinkle of kindness as well as of humor. He turned them upon her frequently as she sat at his right hand during dinner, and she felt he was trying to recall some half-forgotten face or tracing a hidden likeness. He talked little, and what he said was commonplace; but he looked with genial enjoyment on the bright faces to right and left, and listened with a pleased smile to the buzz of talk that made his own taciturnity seem almost perforce. He politely offered Mary a share of the little private dishes with which he was surrounded, as the meal went on. It seemed that he was a dyspeptic and could not eat anything cooked with butter or cream, and that he also had strong likes and dislikes, which his devoted wife strictly regarded.

Mary entered with complete enjoyment into the gay chat and found an unconscious stimulant in the admiring looks turned upon her from all eyes, particularly in those from the very handsome pair oppo-

site her. Mr. Logan smiled shrewdly to himself as he poured tea from a special little brownware pot, and recorded the fact that Philip was "taking notice."

By the time they rose from the table, Philip had made up his mind on one point. "Say, Sophie," he said, as he grasped the arm of his fourteen-year-old cousin, on quitting the dining-room, "would Aunt Priscilla mind our taking up the rug in the parlor and having a little dance, just ourselves; and you play us a couple of waltzes, that's a dear."

"Ellen's lots more particular about Holy Week than Mother is; you'd better ask her," Sophie answered, with ready yielding to his blandishments for her own part.

"Oh, no, I think not, Philip," Ellen said, regretful of thwarting him in so modest a wish; "and anyhow, Mary doesn't dance."

"Don't you?" he asked, with sudden loss of interest in his program. "Why not?"

"I don't know how," was the simple answer; but it opened his eyes an eighth of an inch wider. Mary colored and looked mortified at the admission. She could not, off-hand, explain the reason.

"Oh, if that's all, we'll teach her; won't we, Ellen? Come on, let's have a dancing class here in the hall. We'll do without music for religion's sake."

"Philip, I don't like to hear you talk that way," Ellen said gently, but with evident annoyance.

"Oh, come, don't be proper, Nell." He smiled and patted her on the back, and she yielded in so far as to return the smile. He was used to gaining

his point with all womankind, and Mary was to be no exception, it seemed.

"I don't know that Mary wants to be taught," Ellen said, looking questioningly at her friend.

"Oh, yes, I do," Mary answered readily, and the lesson began forthwith; proving her a very *intelligent* pupil, if not so light on her feet as her free and graceful movements at other times would have seemed to promise. Once, by way of illustration, Philip caught Ellen round the waist and waltzed down the hall with her, half against her will. It was only a *small* half, for Ellen was like a piece of thistle-down on her feet, and yielded to her cousin's leading with a gradual abandonment to the rhythmic charm of the dance that was a revelation to Mary.

"I could never in the world dance like that!" she said with grave conviction. "Your feet are so little and so light, they don't seem to rest on the floor at all. I could watch you any length of time, but it discourages me dreadfully. I guess I have what they call a Quaker foot, or else it's a Quaker head, for I don't keep good time."

"Then I'll stop at once," Ellen said, slipping from Philip's arm, in spite of his effort to keep her, and running laughing to her father's "snuggery" at the back of the house. A respite followed her exit, while the younger girls hung admiringly around Mary, and Edward followed his sister.

"I was just wishing for you, dear," Mrs. Logan said, as Ellen came swooping into the room like a swallow. There was evidently no awe attached to this "den," nor was its proprietor looked on so much

in the light of a father as of a petted elder brother. They rarely consulted him seriously; and their mother usually saved him even the trouble of expressing his own opinions aloud.

"I was just telling 'Daddy' of your wish to ask Mary's guardian, Mr. Brown, to your birthday party," she said, "and he thinks, as I do, that it will be a mistake. It was like you to plan it, but an older man would spoil your fun very much. He would be like a fish out of water, I'm afraid."

Ellen was stooping over her father, who half reclined on an old-fashioned haircloth heirloom of a chair with adjustable back and leg rests. She was fingering the sleek black hair above his forehead, and giving him little pecks of kisses in a half-caressing, half-joking, fashion. She straightened herself at once and looked at her mother with a troubled expression.

"But, Mother, I spoke to Mary about it, and I wouldn't disappoint her for anything! She is counting on it already, I know."

"I don't mean to give up *asking* him, dear. It would be very nice to have him come out, but when we are by ourselves. Mary would have more chance to enjoy him too, and I know she will understand if you explain to her that there are just three or four youngsters of your own ages coming."

"Why, the children are to be at the table, aren't they?" Ellen asked quickly. "I should hate a party without them; and as for Mary's understanding, Mother, you don't know her as well as I do. She isn't the least bit *touchy*, and if I told her we

were afraid of being crowded at the table, or something like that, she would agree at once without another thought; but as for understanding that *he* could ever be a misfit in any company, or that being the same age has anything to do with enjoying people, she would be perfectly astonished. I am sure she would feel that not to have Mr. Brown, if we could get him, would be like shutting out the sun. She just adores the ground he walks on, and he really is awfully nice."

"Well, it is to be a very informal time, and it is your party and Philip's, so, if you think he will not mind, I will write to Mr. Brown this evening," Mrs. Logan said with an affectionate smile at Ellen's warmth.

"I don't know anything about whether she's pretty or not," Edward, Jr., broke in, "but I bet she's the real thing!" It was a number one compliment coming from that quarter, and caused Mr. Logan to look with amused surprise at his one son who was so utterly unlike him in every way except in reserve.

"It is a curious thing," he said. "If anyone had asked me a couple of hours ago what Dick Farnham looked like, I should have said I hadn't the least recollection of him. (He came to Haverford the year I was leaving, and he was a mere boy.) But every time I looked at Miss Farnham during dinner, his face kept coming back till I can see him now as plainly as I see you. And the funny part is that she doesn't look much like him. There must be some *expression* very like him to recall him so vividly to

my mind after all these years. I was afraid she noticed my staring at her."

"I guess she gets used to it," Edward said, with a grim little smile. "Philip never took his eyes off her."

"I hope you and Philip won't come to blows over her," his father said, teasingly, as he took up the novel he had dropped on his knee at Ellen's onslaught. He knew it excited Edward's scorn to be accused of any fancy for a girl, and his dark eyes twinkled as he saw his son turn to poke the fire with a most significant grunt.

Mrs. Logan seated herself at the desk, where she did much of her husband's business for him, and asked Ellen for Mr. Brown's address.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN GETS THE RING

“O H, Mary, you do look too *lovely* in that dress! It suits you exactly.”

Ellen had come to get her friend on the birthday evening. The dress was a present from Mrs. Wharton, who had begged Mary to let her give her this “for the party,” and had shown such gratification at the result that she almost made Mary feel herself a benefactress. It was of white *crêpe-de-Chine*, simply but correctly made according to the fashion of the time, with an over-skirt draped above a “foundation” of white silk, a modest amount of that bouffant effect in the back which the vulgar have designated a “bustle,” and sleeves that showed the round, white arms half way to the elbow. She gave herself a scrutiny in the glass as she turned.

“And so do you in yours,” she answered. Ellen did indeed look almost pretty in a pink silk gown with trimmings of soft lace, and a bunch of rose-buds at the corner of the square-cut corsage. (It was her first low-necked gown.) Her cheeks had a soft flush of excitement and her eyes were several shades darker than their wonted pale blue-gray. The color deepened as Philip met her on the stair-landing with an unfeigned exclamation of approval. His face was very

expressive as Mary appeared behind her, but he said nothing.

"Oh, isn't that the carriage?" Mary cried, pausing to listen to the sound of nearing wheels, and then darting down straight toward the front door. Philip glanced at her radiant face as she sped by him.

"Is she as fond of him as all that?" he thought, with a jealous pang that died the minute his eyes encountered the tall figure ushered in by a flood of light from the setting sun. "He had nothing to fear from a man so old and ugly as that!"

Philip was a lord of creation who brooked no rivals where he was pleased to give the rein to his fancy, but he decided that she might beam on this guardian of hers as brightly as she liked. She was a "vision of delight" that seemed to dazzle John as she stood in the golden glory. His manner was constrained and formal as he turned to speak to Ellen, his eye resting a moment, in passing, on Philip's waiting figure.

The latter's introduction to him was hardly accomplished when a young man who had driven up with John from the train rushed at Adonis and grasped him by both arms, while a hubbub of laughing and joking ensued that was interrupted by Mrs. Logan and Edward, Jr.

Quarter of an hour later the library was buzzing with merriment. The three guests, besides John, were young habitués of the house, on the most familiar of terms with all the family; and the laughing and talking verged on the boisterous.

Mrs. Logan glanced over to where her son stood talking to John with the deferential courtesy one shows

to an older man whom one "delights to honor;" but his face had that look of effort to concentrate which is unmistakable in spite of perfect manners, and he could not help overhearing what went on around him. Mary was in demand at once, and was in gay spirits, excited by her new young-lady dress and by the admiring glances of the newcomers. She was not unmindful of her guardian, but had no chance to speak to him yet, and she would *not* guess that a short delay would matter much.

"I wish Edward would hurry up and come," Mrs. Logan said to herself, looking anxiously for her husband. "It is just as I expected. He really is a very distinguished looking man for all his plainness, perhaps because of it. There is an air about him." Faithful dumb-bell practice had made John's shoulders gain in breadth and erectness in the past year, and in spite of painful self-consciousness—for perhaps the first time in his life—his manner had its usual grave dignity as he looked down—very far down—on his young host.

He was agreeing with Mrs. Logan as to his own misfit, and something of the pain the admission cost him was visible in his face, despite his brave efforts to interest himself in what this polite, intelligent lad was saying to him. At that moment Mrs. Logan brought her husband up, and the two fingers were offered with a dancing master's bow and real courtesy. Edward, Jr., released from his duty, moved in Mary's direction and was rewarded for his attention to John—as *perhaps* he may have foreseen—by a very friendly glance. His face straightway gained unusual anima-

tion and softness as he entered with zest into the lively chatter.

When the dining-room doors were thrown open, the little group moved out as helter-skelter as a flock of chickens, amid exclamations of curiosity and delight. John, with Mrs. Logan at his side, quietly took up the rear, but she noticed his wistful glance wander to Mary's brilliant face instead of to the prettily decorated table with its glow from the big hanging lamp and the thirty-nine candles burning brightly on the "double" cake.

"Mr. Brown, I have put you between Mary and me," Ellen said, smiling at him. His quick flush of appreciation made her again have that impulse to make up to him for something—she did not define to herself what. He pushed her chair up to the round table as Joe Potter, the younger of the two male guests, did the like for Mary; but as he seated himself, Mary turned her happy face up to him and for a moment her hand stole into his, and the whole room was suddenly illumined with rose-color.

There was small chance for *tête-a-têtes* at that board. But whether it were the magic of Mary's touch and nearness or the impossibility of remaining a stranger in that merry company, John's formality and stiffness melted fast and he found himself laughing at the sallies of the others and even adding a word now and then when there was a chance, which was not often. He was quite content to rest on the outskirts, and he had to acquaint himself with another Mary than any of those he had known. She would have seemed a woman all at once, but for that childish handclasp

and an occasional naïve question or suggestion that set them laughing. People always laughed *with* Mary as well as *at* her.

When the time came to blow out the candles and cut the cake, the hilarity increased. Philip won the birthday wish, and for a second his brilliant eyes met Mary's and she colored without knowing why. A pair of grave, dark ones followed the glance to her rose-red cheek and then lingered long on Philip's glowing face.

"I am going to divide my side of the cake equally for the men, and you must divide yours for the girls, Philip," Ellen said, standing up and suiting the action to the word. "Then we'll take up a subscription for Mother and Father. Their fortunes are told! Now, Mr. Brown, you shall be the first man to choose!"

"Oh, thank you," John said, smiling, but the smile was no longer spontaneous. "I will come in on the 'subscription.' I'm sure you and Mary will share with me?"

"Oh, but you must try your fortune!" Ellen cried, while Marion Scott, who had been Ellen's dearest friend from babyhood, exclaimed, "Oh, I thought only bride-cake had rings and things in it!"

"Well, this is a double coming-of-age, and nearly equal to a wedding," Mrs. Logan answered, laughing, "and we have put two rings, two thimbles, and two dimes, so everybody has an equal chance."

Finding that it was expected of him, John took the huge wedge of cake nearest him, as the colored butler lifted the stand and carried it around. As each one fell to breaking up the cake, shouts of mirth sounded

from all sides. John was so interested in Mary's performance that he broke his own cake mechanically without even glancing down. All eyes were suddenly turned on little Priscilla, who jumped up and down with excitement as she held up a gold wedding ring in her thumb and finger. Mr. Logan, who sat next her, put his arm about her with a congratulatory squeeze, and the whole table beamed at her. They groaned over Ellen, whose dainty hand appeared above the table decorated with a silver thimble. "You too, Philip!" she cried, as her cousin, with a very wry face displayed its mate, while two guests received the dimes that promised riches.

"Where is the—? Why, Mr. Brown, you've got the man's ring!" Her announcement was greeted with such hearty applause and good will that John had no chance to feel himself an interloper. He lifted the little circlet with heightened color, but his own crooked smile, as he looked across at Priscilla.

"Extremes meet, Miss Priscilla," he said. The child was bright enough to catch his meaning, and no child ever looked at John without an answering smile.

"Look at Mary!" Ellen exclaimed, with a rippling laugh. "Don't take it so to heart, Mary." She was almost afraid of having gone too far, for Mary's eyes were fixed on her guardian's face with a startled, wondering look, as at a portent. She looked at Ellen and blushed when she was so directly alluded to, but there was general merriment at her expense.

"You ought to have got the ring instead of this little chit, Miss Mary," Mr. Logan said, pinching his daughter's ear and quite misinterpreting Mary's

ill-concealed seriousness. "But you won't have to wait long! You'll find that sort of ring growing on every bush."

"Hear Father paying compliments," Edward, Jr., ejaculated, but his eyes were on Mary's blushing face as she looked straight in Mr. Logan's twinkling, kindly ones. "I don't want a ring," she said. "I'm never going to get married. I'm going to study law and go into partnership with John!" There was not a vestige of a smile on her lips nor in her eyes. She announced the fact as though it were hardly opportune for so large an audience, but were drawn from her perforce. The banter which was on each tongue at the incongruous idea could not find fit expression, and at last it was Mr. Logan who entered the breach.

"Mr. Brown will find his place of business mobbed and his windows broken if he tries that," he said gravely, his agate-brown eyes very bright.

The need for a reply was obviated by the passing of a brimming pitcher of claret punch and the filling of all glasses for the toasts. Edward, Jr., rose and with more facility than one would have expected from him, made a serio-comic speech, ending in a request to Tom Potter to propose the first health to Ellen, as the queen of the occasion.

Mr. Potter, a bright-faced, intelligent youth of twenty or thereabout, rose and made Ellen a very neat and graceful little speech, at which the pink in her cheeks almost rivaled her gown. Neither John nor Mary could understand some joking allusions, as they belonged to a past in which they had no share, but the tone of heartfelt admiration and

affection was evident. As Ellen put her glass to her lips in response and held out her bethimble hand across John and Mary, Mr. Potter looked down on it with a swift change of expression and gave it a hearty squeeze. "I was going to say that I couldn't wish anything better for you than to reap what you sow!" he said laughing, "but I want to add that I hope you may never *rip* what you *sew*!" With which *bon-mot* he sat down amid a chorus of laughing applause from a very indulgent audience.

"Now, Miss Farnham, may our other honored member hear from you first?" Edward said, with mock ceremony.

Mary got up at once and with a quick change from the matter-of-fact simplicity of a moment before, directed an arch smile toward Philip, who had risen too, and faced her with expectant eyes that were as beautiful as her own.

"I hope you may be as wise as Solomon, as rich as Croesus, as strong as Samson, as patient as Job, as great as Alexander, as old as Methusaleh—and as happy as a king," she said, coloring warmly as she lifted the glass to her lips without taking her eyes from Philip's.

"You didn't ask that my birthday wish might be granted," he answered with a quick spark of daring in his face.

"That mightn't be good for you," she answered demurely, lowering her lashes as she sat down, glass in hand.

"Did you ever read the 'Sleeping Beauty'?" Philip asked. "Don't you know that one evil wish

can undo all the good ones—and sometimes a wish left out is just the same?”

“Now shut up, Philip!” Edward interrupted his audacious cousin, seeing Mary in the embarrassing position of being unwilling to try to understand. “Miss Sophia Logan is waiting to be heard from. Like all the Logan family, she is a poetical genius, and I seem to foresee that her remarks will ‘drop into poetry’ and I am sure without ‘extra charge.’”

“Oh, Edward, you put me all out!” Sophie stammered, blushing painfully as she rose amid acclaiming cheers. She read her toast from a bit of paper without once smiling or raising her eyes:

“Here’s to our Ellen,
Her praise I’m a’ tellin’;
I hope she’ll live long
And keep well and strong.
We wish she’d get fatter,
But that doesn’t matter.”

Ellen jumped up and ran around to show her appreciation of this triumph of poetic tribute by a hearty hug and kiss. “I’ll begin to eat corn-meal mush at once!” she promised, while Sophie quickly regained her smiling composure.

“I couldn’t *make up* a poem,” Priscilla announced, getting up before her turn in her eagerness to have her say; “but I just changed the words of one to make them do.”

“In parentheses I would like to inform you, Priscilla, that that is what is usually called a ‘parody,’ and a very nice thing it is too; but don’t let me delay you.”

"Edward, you're just teasing me!" Priscilla said, smiling with a *sang froid* totally different from Sophie's bashfulness. "You all know where I got this from—

"We are sure that Philip can
Be a little gentleman,
And we hope he'll soon be able
To keep ten horses in his stable."

Philip, who had that morning received a present of a beautiful saddle horse from Mr. and Mrs. Logan, answered Priscilla's "parody" in Ellen's fashion. She sat down glowing with satisfaction, and looking down on her ring finger with its unwonted decoration. "You haven't said yours, Edward," she said.

"Mine!" Edward answered, making a sour face at her. "I wish it known that if anything does come into my mind to say, it will be perfectly impromptu." His assurance was received with cries of "Go on! go on!" He stood looking from one to the other with a very whimsical face. Then he lifted his glass and clinked it with Philip's in true student fashion.

"Well—I drink to our prince among cousins:
I hope he'll have birthdays by dozens.

(Notice I don't say hundreds!)

He's never been much of a student,
For he thought application imprudent;
When his elders advised him to hustle,
He put all his mind on his muscle;
And though he is soon to leave college,
We doubt the extent of his knowledge.
But in wisdom at least he's advancing;
He's now giving lessons in dancing,
And we're hopefully led to expect
He'll be teaching—*psychology* (?) next.
(Please excuse the rhyme!)"

While he recited his "impromptu" poem with unmoved gravity, in spite of the laughter of the others, his eyes traveled slowly around the little circle, but as he finished he looked with melancholy significance straight at Mary.

In the midst of the hubbub that followed, John felt himself "a chiel amang them takin' notes." Mr. Logan looked at him from time to time as the fun proceeded. Finally he got to his feet with his characteristic old-time, formal manner, but a very bright twinkle in his eye.

"If you will just let me be heard for a moment," he said, bowing profoundly to John, "I would like to drink to the health of the future bridegroom of the party, Mr. John Brown, whose 'body'—in spite of all reports to the contrary—I rejoice to see is 'all here' (laughing and cheers), and I hope it may have many happy returns."

"Hear Father! Why I never knew what a brilliant family I belonged to," Ellen cried; and the general mirth smoothed over a miserably lame attempt on John's part to respond to this surprising honor done him.

"How wonderfully good to him they all were, and how intent on proving their pleasure in his having won the ring," he thought as he went home. It was all for Mary's sake, of course. Already she seemed to be adopted into the family and on affectionate terms with each one. Already they called each other by their first names—and John's observant eyes in noting Philip's admiration had not missed Edward's less conspicuous glances. "Yes, this was where she

belonged—among these boys and girls of her own age.” He drew out his watch, but was apparently too absent-minded to look at it. Instead, he held it in his hand for the rest of the journey. His face was the face of a man in pain.

“If I could only know and accept the worst, I am sure I am strong enough to bear it; but—” Why had she looked at him like that when he had bid her good bye? He saw her eyes now when he shut his own, but each time the thrill of them reached his heart they were blotted out by Philip Dillwyn’s handsome face and the memory of the dancing lessons.

* * * * *

“Mary,” Philip said, looking at her with changing color on his cheeks and pleading humility in his eyes, “you are going away this afternoon and I don’t know how long it will be before I see you again. We have got to be such good friends in all these days together—wouldn’t you—kiss me—good-bye—just once?” He had taken Mary for a walk on this last day of their vacation. He took her hand and pressed it hard, looking with ill-concealed suspense at her downcast face.

He had decided that Mary was “too innocent to know better,” and he absolved himself of any disrespectful feeling toward her, but he had never in his life wanted so much to kiss anyone.

“I wouldn’t mind,” she said at last, very low, without looking up; “but I don’t think I ought to.”

“Why not?” he said eagerly, leaning toward her without more ado, but she drew resolutely back.

“John won’t let me kiss *him*!” she said, looking

straight at Philip with grave eyes. He started and changed color violently.

"Mr. Brown is a gentleman, Mary," was all he said. He had learned his lesson.

More than once in his short life Philip had been taken to task for faults that showed actual moral obliquity, and he had always received reproof with a humility which went far to disarm criticism; frankly owning himself a sinner, and forgetting his offenses as quickly as those he offended forgot them. The "good" fellows at school had always seemed tame, and he secretly prided himself on his reputation for being something of a scapegrace.

But Mary's half unconscious rebuke struck him in a vulnerable spot and rankled. To be convicted of an offense against the ordinary rules of good breeding pricked his self-love as nothing had ever pricked his conscience, and left an indelible spot on his immaculate self-confidence.

How many of us are there, I wonder, who would rather be written down a sinner than a boor?

CHAPTER XXIX

SALVE FOR A SORE HEART

IT was house-cleaning time at the Browns', and that meant a season of interrupted monotony for every one but John. Except that he was asked to stay away to lunch on the day when the dining-room and hall carpets were up, he would hardly have detected an iota of change in the daily routine. Mrs. Brown was one of those excellent housekeepers who never allow the great semi-annual revival to disturb the comfort, or even so much as catch the eye, of the male members of the family. To have eaten his lunch above a bare floor would have seemed to John a decidedly enlivening experience. Even to have been asked to lend a hand at hanging a picture or mending a break, or lifting or carrying, would have given him a warm human thrill quite incomprehensible to his mother. His whole nature was in revolt against the eternal sameness of his life. Why had it never struck him before? Why had his business and his cricket or tennis always made variety enough?

Once he caught himself wondering as he entered the still house, with its look of "apple-pie" order, what Mary's housekeeping would be like? "Not first class," he feared with a crooked drawing of his

lips, but at least there would be nothing monotonous about it! He colored violently at the vision his mind conjured up. "I wish we might have Miss Mary all the year round," John Patterson had said. How could anyone who loved her and had seen her once in the company of boys and girls echo such a wish? To bring that warm, bright, living personality into this—he did not complete the thought. And yet, there had been nothing dull about the house during her visits. How often since the Christmas holidays the words had rung in his ear: "I am come that they might have *life*, and that they might have it more abundantly;" and he had felt that he understood their meaning for the first time.

At twenty-one John had found the society of his contemporaries uninspiring at the very least, and even before Margaret's death he lapsed easily into the habits of middle age and was far happier by the reading lamp at home than in the most attractive gathering of his kind. And now—when he faced the fact that middle age was indeed close upon him, his whole soul seemed rising in rebellion, as at the closing round him of a living tomb. Evening after evening he seated himself in his old chair opposite his mother and took up his book, only to find himself reading the same paragraph over and over. He tried reading aloud with better success; two senses were better than one; but if his mother had put him through an examination on the subject matter of what he read with just emphasis and intelligent phrasing, she would often have been startled beyond measure at the blank disclosed. She noticed a change

in him; he seemed even thinner and darker than his wont, and there was a look in his eyes sometimes that made her vaguely uneasy. She could not diagnose it. Six months ago she would have thought that she could; but then he had astonished her by his cheeriness.

She could not know that the lure of the spring was on him, that he was longing for the country, for the birds and flowers, for youth and life—for something stronger than youth or life. That he was feeling himself an endless "misfit." Had he not been an oddity in those parties of fifteen years ago, when much of the talk about him had been meaningless to him, and the fun often inane? And now—the memory of that evening at the Logans' was so fresh in his mind! Certainly the wit had been of the college class-day variety when not actually childish, and the round games of the evening had been partly children's games; but children are genuine, and the merry-making at the birthday party had been genuine and a quite new experience to John; and the knowledge of what lay before Mary, now that she was really leaving the nest and finding her wings, made his own future seem empty and chill.

He had been oftener to see Catharine that winter than to see Mary herself, and the hours he spent with the lonely woman were an unfailing pleasure to both. They talked of nothing but Mary; sometimes they forgot to talk at all and would sit in sympathetic silence, each wrapped in a veil of memories. He always paid a visit to the little parlor, whither Catharine never followed him, letting him browse

at will among its treasures and come back to her with a quiet face that she had learned to know.

He came back from Fernwood one warm afternoon in early May with a greater unrest than ever in his heart and a look of steady patience on his face that was almost endurance. The memory of a year ago was vivid within him and he was full of feverish uncertainty as to what this summer was to bring. He knew that Mary had already received invitations enough to more than fill her whole vacation, but in all her letters there was a reserve on the subject that was significant, and that same reserve he found reflected in Catharine's honest face and speech.

"John," his mother said, looking solicitously at his haggard face as he sat idly cutting the leaves of the newest *Atlantic Monthly*, already a week old, "I really think you need a tonic!"

He looked up quickly and colored, but answered with a very fair imitation of a laugh. "Why, Mother, I never needed a tonic in my life! Perhaps the warm weather is making me seem lazy."

His mother was not listening. Her handsome face was turned toward the picture of Margaret on the wall.

"I think it will be a good plan to close the house this summer," she said after a short pause. "There will be nothing to keep you in town"—coloring a little in spite of her wish to seem unconcerned—"and I was talking to Hannah the other day, and find that she and John would be more than thankful to be able to spend two or three months up in Lebanon County with her mother on the farm. Her mother

is poorly and is getting on in years, and Eliza isn't well this spring."

She stopped and glanced at John, whose eyes were on the thin ivory blade which he was drawing across the palm of his hand, but there was no inattention in his face.

"It was a kind thought," he said quietly, "and no doubt it would be the best plan."

"I want you to have a good vacation this year." Could she be unconscious of the irony in her words? "And if you did need to come down for anything, you could go to the club with George and be very comfortable."

No answer! The paper cutter moved gently back and forth. A feeling of irritation and self-pity was taking possession of her.

"Then I shall be glad of an excuse to get rid of Matilda," she said sharply. "She is growing so careless and negligent, and nothing has been cooked as it should be lately. Hannah says that she had some misunderstanding with the man who has been coming to see her all winter, and he has stopped his visits, and Matilda is all upset about it. A cook with a 'beau' is a very unsatisfactory institution, and I did think she was safe! She's past thirty, I know, but the desire for 'beaux' dies hard. I'll look out for one that's *forty* in the autumn."

The thin blade of the paper-cutter bent dangerously. Then John looked up with an odd smile.

"You see, the Lord made her a woman before He made her a cook."

"What in the world do you mean by that? You

do say such queer things sometimes. Don't you suppose I know that! Oh," with a sudden complete change of voice, drawing her hand from her pocket with the handkerchief she had been seeking and an opened letter which her fingers had encountered on the quest, "I forgot to read Sarah's letter; I was in such a state of vexation when it came this afternoon." The letter from Mrs. Wharton had apparently been commenced and then hastily thrust in her pocket without the envelope. John looked up quickly and watched her face as she opened it and read a few lines with indifference. He saw indifference change to displeasure and the line of her lips thin perceptibly.

"I think Sarah must be crazy! She wants you to come all the way back from Northeast before you've more than got there, and spend the rest of June with her." Her color rose and she did not look at John.

The paper-cutter snapped in two with a sharp report. Then she did indeed look up. "I'm so sorry!" John said simply, looking at the broken toy. "I ought never to touch such delicate things with my big, awkward hands."

But his mother's face had become thoughtful. Some feeling was struggling with the irritation of a moment before. She read on as though nothing had occurred to interrupt her. The letter was not long. She had finished it some time before she lifted her eyes.

"I suppose you know that Mary is to go there from school for the rest of the month, and of course Sarah

thinks you would like to be with her." A somber cloud was settling over her face. "But I was thinking of asking Mary to pay us a visit at Northeast some time during the summer, and I think it would be perfectly absurd for you to come all the way down to visit with her here. Of course, I wouldn't want you to consider *me*; I shall have plenty of company; but I can't approve your having that long, tiresome, hot journey twice in a week. There's no sense in it!"

"Mother!" The reproach was the sharper that it was so gentle. He saw her lips begin to tremble and her eyes to fill.

"Oh, I suppose I'm selfish and inhuman! You might think so from the way Sarah talks, and you look as though—I did hope you'd gotten over being so——" She broke off, dried her eyes energetically with her handkerchief and abruptly left the room.

John did not attempt to stop her nor follow her. He held the ivory fragments so tightly in his right hand that the carving on the handle was making deep marks in the firm flesh, while he covered his eyes with his left.

A step came toward the library door. It was not his mother's, but John Patterson's. He raised his flushed face and met the frankly knowing smile with which John handed him a letter—the letter.

I had a hundred things I wanted to talk to you about, and when you could not meet us last week it made me forget most of them, and I'm sure I never mentioned in my horrid little scrappy notes since that I had asked Mrs. Wurts and Jack

to let me give up going to his Commencement. I found it wasn't just listening to exercises and looking at sports, but dancing and gaiety of all kinds, and as the time comes around again that Father and I landed here last year—but you know!

This morning I had a letter from Jack and an enclosure from his mother. He is very much disappointed, but they both understand and think it is natural that I should rather go straight to Mrs. Wharton; only they say I must promise to come to them at York Harbor for all of July. Ellen says I must go camping in the Adirondacks with them the middle of August, and I *should* like that, being in the woods and on the water all the time. If only you could go too!

Not another word of wishing she were to be with him as they had been last summer.

I had such a lovely visit with them I couldn't have time to feel sad, and everybody was so good to me! But since I got back here, I don't know what is the matter. I can't seem to "brace up" at all, and the preparations and fussing for Commencement make me want to run away.

You *will* come on Saturday, won't you? Miss Newlin said that if she had only known you could have come on Wednesday, she would have made a special exception in your favor, even if it offended some other people.

I want you to tell me about the people who have bought the old house. It is a great deal of money, isn't it? I feel as though I shall be almost rich, and I'm glad you think it is best to keep the furniture. It is very old-fashioned, like Mrs. Wharton's; but I love that kind, and I shall be so glad to know I can have it if I ever have any place to put it. Anyhow, I wouldn't like to have anyone strange sleep in Grandma's old bed where Father died, nor sit on that dear old sofa.

"John," Mrs. Brown's voice said at his elbow. He started and rose abruptly, trying to hide the tears in his eyes—for there were tears enough to brim over,

although his heart had not felt so warmed for weeks.

"Sarah Wharton says that Mary knows nothing of the possibility of your being there, and she wants you to say nothing to her. It is to be a surprise. She has evidently settled it in her mind that you are coming, and I see how you feel about it, so I will say no more."

John knew that any demonstration on his part would be ill-timed. He only said, "Thank you, Mother," in a rather unsteady voice.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH THE HEROINE DRAWS A PICTURE OF HER IDEAL HUSBAND

“**H**OW I do love the country!” Mary exclaimed as she sat on the back porch of the old Wharton homestead with her hostess and John. Mrs. Wharton was busy with her summer work—crocheting cotton mats—while both her guests were idle. The scent of the hay that was being mowed in the orchard came to them stronger and stronger as the sun grew hotter and hotter, and the whirr of the machine put an end to conversation when it came on their side of the square.

“I love everything that grows and everything they do on farms. Sarah said I might help her again with the butter to-morrow.—You don’t mind, do you?—I just love to turn it over and over and make the drops of buttermilk come out of it. My arms are ever so strong,” feeling her muscle critically and extending her right arm to John for corroboration. “Do you know,” with a rather shamefaced glance from one of her listeners to the other, “I shocked Ellen by vaulting over a fence one day while I was there. Philip and Edward were along too, but they only laughed.”

“I wonder what your grandmother would have

thought of that!" Mrs. Wharton said in a teasing voice. "I used to be considered as wild as a colt, but I never remember doing anything so bad as that; after I was in long skirts, anyway."

Mary colored warmly.

"You could never do anything really unwomanly or immodest, Mary," John hastened to say, winning his reward in the half shy, entirely grateful glance she gave him. "You are impulsive, but not daring."

"Mr. Logan said he could see my 'Quaker backing sticking out all around me,' she said as though it were a sort of justification. "But"—with a sudden after-thought—"he said I was what they used to call a 'free Quaker.' They were the kind who would fight in self-defense or for their liberties. I am sure I would have been that kind. What makes me most inclined to join the Friends now is their liberty. There isn't really any other good reason; for John believes just as much in the 'Inward Light' as you and I do, Mrs. Wharton, even if he is an Episcopalian, and he said on Sunday that the quiet meeting was just as real a Communion service as he ever attended." Her face softened with sudden solemnity and her voice dropped. "Meeting seems very peaceful," she went on thoughtfully; "but," with a deprecating glance up in John's attentive face, "I don't really care much for *peace*. I would rather *do* something or be stirred all up by a fine sermon."

"Fine sermons are rare in any church, I am afraid," John said with a sympathetic smile. "I believe choosing a denomination is a good deal like choosing a family would be. If we had to start out to select a

father and mother from among the best people in the land, we should find it hard work, in cold blood. We should see the faults in all of them, for we all have some, and we should make up our minds to stay orphans and be free. And on the other hand, if we make it our duty to do all we can to better the church in which we happen to be born, and overlook its faults where we can't help them, we are pretty sure to grow to love it. Matters of belief are different, of course, but in the essential things we all believe a good deal alike."

"We do," Mary said with a quick flush.

"I don't know what I believe," Mrs. Wharton put in; "at least, I could never tell anybody. I think that is the way with a good many of our branch of Friends, and I suppose it is a weakness. They have been so much misunderstood and have heard themselves set down so often as a sort of heathens with no belief, that I think they are shy of committing themselves. You have a straight, intelligent idea of what you believe, Mary."

"Do you think that matters much?" Mary asked seriously.

"Well, I think we need just such stuff as there is in you, especially we 'Hicksites.' So many of our nice, pleasant, honest young people—even the young married ones—don't feel any sense of responsibility toward the Meeting and don't teach their children to go to Meeting. They drift into churches, especially the Episcopal Church, because they like the service; but they have no idea of joining it. They call themselves Friends and are proud of the Quaker

traditions, but they have no loyalty to the Friends to-day. They think too much about the peculiarities, and they don't like peculiarities. The Orthodox Friends are much more 'concerned' and I believe you would be happier with them, Mary."

"But Father said he never agreed with the sermons," Mary answered with grave surprise at such a suggestion coming from Mrs. Wharton.

"Well, I have an idea they have broadened a good deal since your father was a boy, especially the young ones, and they're likely to keep on; and there is a great deal more life in their meetings, and more—I suppose you would call it 'spirituality'—than there is in ours, and much more general culture."

"I am sure that is so," John said, "and I have noticed myself the difference in the devotional feeling; but"—he was thinking of the primness and smugness of some he had known, and their intellectual timidity, and picturing Mary in the company of those sweet, modest girls, some of whom were not allowed to study Shakespeare's plays nor even to read a standard novel.

"You are too much like your father to feel at home in the Orthodox Friends' Meeting, I am afraid," he said, recalling Dick's boyish explosions. "I believe you could do without culture and refinement better than some other things, but there seems to me a great change coming over the tone of thought in all denominations, and I think twenty years, or even ten, will see the two branches of Friends much nearer together."

"Oh, well, I don't need to make up my mind yet," Mary said, drawing a long breath. "I don't care so

much about belonging to something as I did last year." She seemed to dismiss the subject. The long silence was full of sweet scents and sights and sounds.

"I smelled that gingerbread!" she exclaimed, as the little maid appeared with a plateful, and a pitcher of lemonade.

"You will find that the Friends are very much given to good things, Mary," John said, laughing as he helped himself to a generous piece and took a bite.

Night after night he knelt by the big Creole bed trying to bring his unruly thoughts into line and only able to repeat over and over that one more day was gone; one more note had fallen due and must be paid from his fast-waning treasury of happiness. If the next two years could have been unveiled for him he would have felt bankrupt indeed. But the future is merciful, and when, early in July, he left Mary at York Harbor and wended his way northward, his mind was on that other visit that was to follow and the importance of getting his mother to set a date. He had spoken to Mary of Mrs. Brown's suggestion and her face had been expressive enough. Attractive as the invitations were to pleasure-parties of her contemporaries, and much as she liked the Logan family and Mrs. Wurts and Jack, the intercourse with a man of John's calibre, the honest deference he showed to her opinions, and the readiness with which he consulted her on questions that concerned him deeply, were a far more thrilling satisfaction to her earnest nature than Philip Dillwyn's thinly-veiled love-making or Jack Wurts' impetuous admiration. Her training had

made her mentally and spiritually too mature for her age, childlike as she still was on the social side. It proved a summer of rapid development in that way too, and John, who had a trick of reading between the lines, was not surprised that her letters were full of new reserves.

Perhaps Mary was hardly conscious of having anything to conceal so far as her own feelings were concerned; but the same sense of loyalty that had prevented her telling of the little episode with Philip, kept her from writing of Jack's confession of love for her and wish to exact a promise for that future when they should be old enough to marry. Writing was her only means of confession, after all, for Mrs. Brown's invitation came so late that she was definitely pledged to other people. John could not understand his mother, but finally came to the conclusion that she felt that too many sweets were not good for him and really only intended the visit from Mary to be contingent on his declining Mrs. Wharton's invitation.

Mary would gladly have put aside other things, when the note finally came, though her pride was touched, and she realized that Mrs. Brown was not eager for her acceptance; but she would not subtract a day from the two weeks promised to Catharine, nor fall short of her promise of help to Miss Newlin before the school term began. The Browns would be home by that time, anyhow, she thought.

Miss Newlin, who asked Mary pointed questions, found her less reticent than she had been with John, and soon learned of Jack's boyish proposal and Mary's surprise and regret.

"I do wish he would be friends with me just the same," the girl said with starting tears. "But he was so hurt in his feelings he said he didn't want to see me if I didn't care about him that way, and he was so jealous of Philip and Edward and every boy I ever knew. He was too much of a gentleman to speak to me till just as I was coming away. I told him I didn't like the others any better than I did him, but only imagine me *engaged* to be *married*, now, Miss Newlin!" She spoke with the hot blush of an outraged child.

"If I *ever* was going to be engaged it wouldn't be to a *boy* like Jack. I would want to marry someone that I could look up to; somebody who was strong and good and I would always know was right, and who would understand me and be interested in the same things I was, and——" She checked herself, suddenly aware that she had been carried away by her topic and that Miss Newlin was looking at her with a curious light in her eyes.

"And I believe, with your nature, you would be making a wise choice, dear," she said quietly; "but where will you ever find such a man?"

"Oh," Mary began impulsively, and stopped short. She did not color now; a strange, arrested expression met Miss Newlin's observant gaze, and the rich rose tint faded from her cheeks. She looked like one suddenly confronted with a new and startling experience for which she is all unprepared. Self-knowledge was born at last within her, not a full-grown, panoplied Minerva, but a "naked, new-born babe," dazzled by the light in which he finds himself, and all unconscious of that identity to which he is to grow. It

was a vastly different thing from the self-knowledge of the woman who all at once knows herself to be in love. It was only borne swiftly in upon her trembling heart that her maiden ideal was drawn from a living model and who that model was.

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER "HILL OF DIFFICULTY"

THAT was the busiest winter John had ever known, for his practice was growing apace.

He had long ago availed himself of a mild detective service, or his generosity would have been imposed upon at every turn by those who could well afford to pay. He did not decline paying clients, as such, and he found them more and more insistent after each successful case. For some reason, best known to himself, money had begun to be more of a temptation to him; but he resolutely resisted allowing time needed by poor clients to be usurped by rich ones. He always reminded himself that his purpose was *service*, but he considered that he gave his best service when he used his strong personal influence in getting people to adjust their differences without recourse to the law. "Mr. Brown spends most of his time keeping folks out of court," his old bookkeeper was often heard to say, and nothing could tempt John to use his time or talents to clear a man whom he believed to be guilty.

"But everyone has a right to the benefit of law," a friend had said to him at the beginning of his career; "and a man must be proved guilty before he is condemned."

"That's true," John had replied quietly; "but that's not what I'm in business for. If I'm caught by a client who seems to me innocent at first, I shall go through with the defense to the best of my ability and not give him away by backing out, but I don't think I'll often be caught; at least, not in criminal cases." And he rarely was. Any case that seemed to him of doubtful righteousness he calmly declined; and, indeed, it was years now since a man or woman conscious of actual guilt had visited that office. If it once leaked out that Mr. Brown had declined a case the evidence was damning to the applicant, whether prosecutor or defendant.

Much of his precious time was taken up in giving simple business advice, especially to women, and for years he had paid the taxes—not heavy ones, to be sure—on a large tract of Tennessee lands owned by two little ladies who had always been land-poor, and were urging his consent this winter to their accepting what seemed to them a princely sum from a man whom any business man would have recognized as a sharper. John had sympathetically but stoutly stood his ground, scenting a coal vein or a railroad or both.

"I'm going down there one of these days and look the place over myself," he had said, setting aside poor little Miss Letitia Morgan's protests. "You're going to pay me for everything, with interest and compound interest, when your ship comes in, and it's coming."

He had seen little of Mary, the winter through, beyond those tantalizing visits to the school when it

seemed to him that he discounted all his pleasure by "counting the moments that too quickly flee." At Thanksgiving, Miss Newlin, who had commenced the term in poor condition, was so ill that Mary would not leave her, and when the longed-for Christmas vacation was near, Mary herself had succumbed to the newly imported "grippe," and had narrowly escaped pneumonia. Rigidly excluded from the Beechfield nursery by Mary's orders, poor John passed many evil quarters-of-an-hour in those two long weeks.

"They say strong people get it just as easily as weak ones, and have it even worse," she had insisted; and as usual she had had her way. When, a fortnight later, she and Ellen had been invited by Mrs. Brown to pour tea at an afternoon reception, the white birthday-party dress had needed taking in, and the brilliant school-girl complexion had been several shades paler. Miss Newlin had seemed so tired when John escorted her and her charges to the station that evening that he was not surprised to receive a letter shortly after, telling of her resolution to give the reins of government at the school to her two able coadjutors, who were to be married in the spring. "I shall keep my literature and early English," she wrote; "but everything else must go. There is no use trying longer to deceive myself with the hope of resuming it at some future time. I feel old and broken, with no power to gain back what I have lost; but God grant that I be not altogether useless if I can only learn to accept my limitations."

The letter had commenced in brighter vein, with an

account of Mary's victory in one of the impromptu debates that always followed the "current events" class. In this instance the subject given out had been the burning one of Woman Suffrage, and Mary's side, with Mary easily leading, had championed the unpopular cause. John's eyes were full of mirth as he read the record, but the mirth had been short-lived. Miss Newlin's quiet acceptance of her fate went to his heart and the letter filled him with sadness and uncertainty.

Its sequel reached him some weeks later across the counter of a dingy hotel in Northern Tennessee, where he had gone on his detective quest for the pathetic little ladies who were good friends, if unprofitable clients. He had come in from a very fatiguing but highly satisfactory day's work and was thinking exultantly that he might pack his valise and say good-bye to rancid butter and dirty table-cloths as early on the morrow as the stage would start. He did not carry the letter to his room for the good reason that its cramped accommodations were no more alluring than the untidy hall, with its array of cuspidors, where at least he could be by himself at this supper hour and where there were one or two chairs on which he was not afraid to stretch his tired limbs.

Miss Newlin told in briefest fashion that the doctor wished her to give up work altogether and go abroad for a year at least.

I should like to take Mary, of course, but you and she must decide. I shall take my valuable maid, Rachel, so Mary will have no responsibility nor care. But I am afraid she will not go unless you urge it, and I know what that would mean for

you to do. I am too great a coward even to break the news to her. There is not much left of the school term, and in the vacation it is probable that I should not see much of her if I were at home, so she need not come against her will; but I am not ill, and hope to avert illness by this means and to give her a great deal of enjoyment as well as profit by a European journey. She has lived much abroad, but you know she has seen little and is at a most receptive age.

John's eyes were on the floor and his intent face seemed considering only how it was possible, with so many targets provided, for so many shots to miss the mark. At length he took up the letter and read it over again, weighing each clause as he would have weighed the evidence for a baffling case. Reared though he had been in the "old school" systems in every department of life, he was not one of those who hold that to do good a medicine must needs be bad. The fact that his whole soul rose in protest against this medicine was in his eyes no reason for taking it.

The gray-haired negro who came to remind him that supper was on, looked at his face and hoped with respectful familiarity that "his folks was all well." John was already on good terms with the whole working force of the tavern, from the manager, who was man of all work, to the jolly black cook; and the best the house afforded was his to command. Could angels do more? Well, John had a private conviction that an energetic angel with a pail of suds, a pot of glue and a few nails, could have materially altered the "circumstances," but, as usual, he kept his own council where it was unasked. He tried not to seem unappreciative of stringy fried chicken and corn griddle-cakes

and molasses (the molasses was good, and made a substitute for butter), and even managed to exchange ideas with the waiter—who had some—while steadily revolving in his mind the pros and cons of Miss Newlin's plan.

The coming sun had only just reddened the eastern sky when he set out in the ramshackle stage for Bridgeville, the railway station, ten miles away. He had spent the night to some purpose, and his mind was made up—provided, always, that Mary would agree with him. He knew that Mrs. Wharton was to spend the summer abroad and that her passage out was engaged for early May. He had carefully considered the question of asking his mother's chaperonage for Mary for the summer, and the mere thought made a sledge-hammer of his heart. Mrs. Brown was much more unbending toward the beautiful, graceful young woman, whose manners were no longer open to criticism, and who had made a distinct sensation at the reception. She had acknowledged to John afterward that it had seemed more like "old times," and the enthusiastic comments reaching her from all sides had not left her unmoved. She had even felt a certain pride of proprietorship in this universally acclaimed loveliness, and had announced her intention of giving Mary a "coming-out" tea when she finished school, and properly introducing her to their friends.

But John knew that her ingrained jealousy of the girl was not really less, and he remembered the episode of the sermon, little more than a year ago. Perhaps he also recalled the Woman Suffrage debate. His mother's state of feeling toward his ward was too

gratifying and delightful to risk spoiling, and he told himself with a deep-drawn sigh that it was more likely to grow if it was not over-forced for the present. One other thought knocked at the door of his heart; but his mind hardly dared admit it. He would wait and see how Mary took the news.

She was so changed in many ways that he could not count on her as he used, except in matters of principle. Especially, he could not help noticing the difference in her manner toward himself. As he laid the plan before her a few days later he watched her face, his own immovable except for the changing color. There was no impetuous exclamation; no frank resistance to such a proposal, as there undoubtedly would have been a year ago. Only a white stillness and widened eyes that refused to meet his. The blood was behaving strangely in John's arteries.

"Do you want me to go?"

"I!"

She raised her eyes as high as his lips, but dropped them quickly, and a warm flush mounted to her forehead.

"I mean, do you think I *ought* to go?"

John tried to steady his voice as he gave her part of his reasons for thinking so. He saw she understood the rest. With sudden resolution, he played his trump card.

"Would you feel differently if I went over and joined you for two or three months in the summer?"

"Oh, John!" Her face was a sunrise. "Could you possibly?"

John's dyke was in imminent peril. No humblest

man but would have gained hope from the eyes raised to his then; but he *must not* take advantage: the watchword of his conscience must be firmly, unalterably, "Wait!"

No one who saw that quiet parting on the deck of the great ocean liner a few weeks later would have suspected the feeling underlying it. No one, that is, who had not Miss Newlin's key.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH MARY RECEIVES AN EXCITING LETTER AND HER GUARDIAN GETS ANOTHER RING

THE post-boy had been good to Mary that midsummer day in the little Tyrolese village of Bad Gastein, and she sat in the flickering shade with the roar of the waterfalls in her ears, and her eyes lifted for the moment from the treasures in her lap to the glory of the sapphire sky above the mountain-tops. But she was not thinking of the beauties of nature nor "the witchery of the soft blue sky." She took up one of the letters again, and Ellen's bodily presence seemed beside her, so vivid was the stamp of her personality on the well-filled pages.

WOOD LEDGE, June 17th.

DEAREST MARY:

I am just bursting to have a good talk with you, but I must try to content myself with pen and paper. I am always running out of foreign stamps. Well, I saw Edward and Philip off yesterday by the "Etruria," and then came back here. Mother feels it is too sad a place for me, and of course she misses me at home, but I know she is pleased that Caroline has taken such a fancy to me (indeed it's much more than just a fancy) and she would like to do anything we can to help her. It is tremendous to be left alone with all that responsibility. Money is a splendid thing, but I think I prefer having just enough. You never saw anything like the avalanche of begging letters

that come by every mail. Perhaps some of the other letters are influenced by her millions too, but she is so perfectly dear I should think everyone would fall in love with her for herself.

It is very exciting to be here and see the bouquets and presents and notes, and the constant stream of men coming out to call. She makes me come into the reception room or out on the piazza with her, generally, when one is announced, but I am not willing to be a spoil-sport, so I escape when I can. I was caught the other day, and you could never guess by whom. —*Mr. Chandler!*—I had gone into the library to hunt for a book, and Graves, the grand English butler who almost scares me stiff every time he looks at me, showed him in, not knowing there was anyone there. He knew me at once, I saw, so I just came forward and spoke to him, and said I always felt so grateful to him for helping us out in the woods that day, and that we were both sorry that Edward forgot to introduce him to us.

He changed color and gave me a very odd look, and I saw perfectly that he knew Edward didn't forget at all. I told him that Edward was just sailing for Europe and that you had been over there for some time, and he said he knew. I wondered how. I knew he was very much impressed with you, Mary, and would have liked to meet you, but I know now why Mrs. Townsend didn't introduce him either when he turned up at the hotel. They say she is very sensitive over the gossip about him.

While I was talking to him, standing up, Caroline came in and I tried to slip away. She looks very frail in her black clothes, and his expression was so nice and sympathetic as he shook hands with her, but not a bit like a man in love, and he even tried to call me back. I only made some excuse and ran away.

Afterward Caroline called me into her sitting-room, and she was more unnerved than I had seen her through all her trouble. She said I was so sensible she was going to confide in me, and she told me a long story about Mr. Chandler. It seems she was very much attracted by him and she made up her mind she was going to be nice to him no matter what stories they told, but Cousin James was very much opposed to her receiving

him. He didn't absolutely forbid it, but he told her straight out that Mr. Chandler was a very immoral man and had been found guilty in a notorious divorce suit when he was hardly more than a boy; that he hardly ever went with women, and really nice ones wouldn't have anything to do with him; and he had seen him in very gay company. Caroline said they came nearer quarreling than they ever had in their lives, and she had actually opposed her father and let Mr. Chandler call on her. She said, "I told father that he didn't want to *marry* me and never was the least bit loverlike or even familiar"; but now that Cousin James is dead, she made up her mind to tell Mr. Chandler that she couldn't receive him again. She said she had never done such a hard thing in her life, but she felt she owed it to her father.

Mr. Chandler behaved so beautifully about it that she broke down before him and cried like a baby. He turned perfectly white, she said, but he only said that he honored her feeling and admired her courage, and that Cousin James was right. He said he would always value the friendship she had shown him, and that her tears proved that she was a true woman. If you'll believe me, Mary, I cried too, nearly as hard as she did. It was really very delicate of him not to put her display of feeling down to a secret *penchant* for himself. She held out her hand when he rose to go, which he did very soon, and he took it and hesitated a moment, and then he said: "Miss Hutchinson, I should like you to believe one thing of me. If I have forfeited the friendship of *good* women, at least I have never betrayed one nor associated with any not in my own class." I can see she hasn't got over it yet, but neither have I for that matter.

There are some drawbacks about being so popular: you have to hurt so many people's feelings. I don't know whether I am letting "cats out," but you know Mr. Brown's friend, Mr. Raymond, altered this house for Cousin James, and he has been here a good deal since. It seems Cousin James liked him ever so much and encouraged his coming. Cousin Mary Potter, who came here to live before the house was changed, says that Caroline finally felt obliged to hint to Mr. Raymond that

she was a very good friend, but she didn't want him to get any false ideas in his head; and he hasn't been here since. She did it very nicely, 'Cousin Mary says, but he took it to heart far more than she expected. She thought a "stitch in time would save nine," but I suppose the nine were needed already. That was just after Cousin James' death, more than a month ago.

Cousin Mary knows Mrs. Brown very well. She has done a lot of work with her on the Women's Auxiliary, and she says she thinks the only thing that made her sick was the thought of her son's going away. Since he gave it up she seems well enough. She has gone all the way up to Northeast and she couldn't have done that if she'd been really ill. I do think it is a burning shame if he had to stay at home for nothing but *hysterics*! Saints are grand things, but they never get any fun in this world; I am sure Mr. Brown will have a perfect time in the next one. You said he might go over later and bring you back. I do hope he can, and I wish it was going to be next week, only I should hate to disappoint the boys. They are looking forward to having a gorgeous time with you in the Tyrol and Switzerland. I never saw Edward so excited about anything.

Mary was already in receipt of the messages from the travelers telling of Edward's hope of joining her in a few days and of Philip's making a pilgrimage to Bayreuth to the Wagner Festival and taking a look at some of the Northern galleries while he was in Germany. Mary and Miss Newlin had already passed through Berlin and Dresden on their way to the Saltzkammergut.

Mary was a little surprised. She would have been more so, perhaps, if she had heard a colloquy in the compartment of a continental train, which two young Americans had to themselves.

"You go on and join them first, Ed. You needn't

try to hoodwink me. I can see through you like a window-pane. But see here, old man," with an entire change of manner, "you need never be jealous of *me*. I'm out of the running in that quarter. I was rather smitten at first, and I'm awfully fond of her, but she's a little too—high-flown—and serious for me—for keeps. She likes you a good deal better than she does me, anyhow; so if either of us has a right to play second fiddle, it's me. That from a fresh B.A. of Harvard University."

Edward Logan's face had been very grave as he said stoutly: "She's almost too young yet, even to think about in that way, but if I were willing to wait for a couple of years to speak to her, some other fellow wouldn't be, and would cut in ahead. I should like to think I had any chance with her, but just now she cares more for her guardian than for the whole kit and crew of us. Only he's too old for her—to marry." He colored hotly as he uttered the word.

"Oh, Lord!" was Philip's easy rejoinder, as he made himself comfortable with his feet on the opposite seat.

The object of his ejaculatory prayer was at that very moment—I am allowing for difference of time between Aix-la-Chapelle and Northeast Harbor—thinking of the self-same subject, but in different vein.

Soon after his parting with Mary, John had paid a visit to a little shop on Thirteenth Street, where the family clocks and watches were always cleaned and repaired. The jeweler, for so he labeled himself in gilt letters on the show window, made very

few sales from his small stock and spent most of his time squinting through a magnifying glass at the interior workings of the timepieces entrusted to his care. Perhaps it was this habit that had surrounded his eyes with such an array of crows' feet. He rose with a bright smile as John entered, and they chatted like old friends, while the big customer, who seemed to fill the whole shop, detached his watch and handed it across the glass show case.

"I see you still have the ring," he said, looking down into a velvet tray where a few trinkets were displayed in haphazard style.

"Yes," the man answered, with a patient smile, "I guess I'm not likely to part with it in a hurry."

John stood looking down at it with a very thoughtful face and heightened color, while the other seated himself and opened the watch, screwing a monocle into his left eye preparatory to giving the little wheels his whole attention.

There was silence for several minutes; then John said quietly, "I've made up my mind I'd like to have it."

The jeweler almost dropped his precious handful as he looked up in amazement.

"I have a windfall now and then, and I had one yesterday," John went on. "A thousand dollars dropped from the clouds, you might say, and is burning my pocket already. I think you told me once that that was what the ring was worth."

"I said I would be glad to take eight hundred and come out whole, barring interest," the jeweler said, with a vivid flush and trembling fingers, as he

opened the back of the case and lifted out the tray. "I'll never be as big a fool again, I know that; but in this case I really hadn't much choice."

The ring in question was adorned with two diamonds, not very large, but of extraordinary brilliance and perfectly matched. It had been accepted in settlement of a debt some years before, and John knew it by heart, and all the circumstances connected with it. It was not a ring to be easily disposed of in such a shop, and the jeweler had found his brothers in the trade disinclined to pay half the value of the stones. Their real value was not evident to the uninitiated, and the arrangement was not happy from an esthetic point of view. The two brilliant gems were embedded side by side in a heavy wrought gold band, and the invariable criticism was that there should be three stones, or that they should be differently set.

"I have a kind of superstition about it, I think," their owner had once told John. "It was intended for a betrothal ring, and the stones are such perfect matches I never could bring myself to separate them or change them."

John had never forgotten the simple statement. "And yet he needs that money," he had thought with a quickening of sympathetic kinship.

This time he had drawn the "windfall" check from his wallet and asked for a pen. "I'll just endorse this over to you," he said. "You ought to have at least two hundred for back interest, not counting profit."

And the man had been cut short in his stammered

thanks by John's seizing the ring and beating a hasty retreat.

Now he looked at it on its little velvet bed and his will repeated that resolve to wait. "She is too young to know her own heart yet." His thoughts flew to Edward Logan and Philip Dillwyn on their way to join her, perhaps, while he might not stir hand nor foot! "I must not bind her in any way; not until she is twenty at least and has had more experience. Better for her to change now than when it is too late; and she would never break a promise." But the two "perfectly matched" stones were like an omen. A hundred influences of the flesh might come between him and Mary now. He looked at himself in the common little glass over his bureau. There were some influences he could never exert over her as another man might. His uncouth middle age (he did not mince matters) was a poor match for her—his face contracted painfully at the memory of hers. "But our *spirits* match; I *understand* her!"

After all, would it be wrong to bind her by a promise—for her own sake? Philip Dillwyn or Edward Logan might be able to make her happy in the long run, if either of them was able to satisfy her at first. There was no danger for her in this sort of intercourse. He could reason it all calmly out. But—did he not know her well enough to realize the possibility of other dangers? He had not heard her confession to Mrs. Wharton of her father's opinion of her; but that same opinion he had reached by different roads. He knew she had it in her to forget all prudence, as her father had forgotten, and to be more unhappy

than her father had ever been. If, the first glamor past, she even found herself tied to a man who *mis*-understood her; who shared none of her ideals; who— John's imagination tried not to go beyond that, but a black fog seemed to rise over his eyes. Of her *promise* to her father she had told him. From marriage he knew he had the power to save her; but might he not try to use his other power over her to save her from the mistaken passion itself? Her eyes had told him that she loved him—not as she was capable of loving—but he would try to win that too, in spite of his handicaps. The only marriage that could ever make her permanently happy was a true marriage of the spirit; he knew that. And yet, at eighteen, with her temperament—! Why had God ordained that the mating-time of humanity was the age least governed by judgment? That tremendous "Why!"—And yet He *had* so ordained. Was there a purpose in the Infinite Thought further reaching than our finite ideals of congeniality and lasting happiness? Was the marriage "made in Heaven" a marriage of sense, then—not a marriage of spirit? Looking "through *Nature* up to Nature's God," one came only to "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest."

"Who am I that I should try to make myself a little Providence for her!" he said, with a sudden sense of impotent pain. "Sophistry! Humbug!" He looked down again at the twin stones and his hand closed over them fiercely, while the hot blood surged to his face: "I *want* her!" The concentrated force of the three short words was the same; the power

of those clenched hands was the same that had sent his balls over the club-house. A half hour later that same right hand was guiding a steady pen across the thin sheets of "overland mail." Twelve closely written pages—of what? Of heartfelt commentary on Stanley's "Christian Institutions."

* * * * *

"Cousin Mary" Potter—quite at variance with her usual habit of charitable construction—had done Mrs. Brown an injustice. If her ill-health did seem to have been caused by the thought of parting with John, it was far from being "hysterics." No such idea could ever have entered John's head, though he knew that she improved at once when his proposed journey was given up. Late in the summer, however, she flagged alarmingly, and when she entered the door of her Arch Street home, so tired with her long journey that John had almost to carry her up the steep white steps, it was never to leave it again.

The eminent diagnostician called in to consult with the family doctor, pronounced her the victim of an incurable organic disease; but she suffered little, and seemed even to be improving. When the first mild days of early spring came, John spoke confidently of taking her for a drive in the Park as soon as the frost had entirely left the ground and the damp winds were past; but the drive was postponed from day to day, and early in April a paralytic stroke put all thought of improvement out of the question.

A fortnight later, a second and still severer stroke cut short the helpless, speechless misery of those long days and nights, and John was alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN ENCOUNTER THAT WAS NOT CHANCE

“I’M sure John must have answered my cable, and our sudden move has made us miss his message. Of course, we shall have to miss two or three letters, but that doesn’t matter; he is sure to be at the dock to meet us. Only I *should* have liked some definite word. It was no use cabling Mrs. Wharton; but I wrote to the White Star dock here, so she will get the letter as soon as she lands.”

“She will be dreadfully disappointed not to see you. Didn’t she say this was to be a whole year’s trip?”

“Yes, and she expected John to come over next month—‘as soon as he could settle the most important things about his mother’s estate,’ she said. He never wrote *me* of any such possibility.” Suddenly her face was suffused with a warm glow. “It seems impossible that we shall see him in—how many days does this old tub take to cross?” She breathed quickly.

“Ten, I think.” Miss Newlin, leaning back in her steamer chair, closed her eyes and sighed. “Ten days of purgatory for me, I am afraid, in spite of the medicine. I can feel the motion already.”

“Oh, Miss Newlin!” Mary laughed. “Why

the water is as quiet as a lamb! The head steward has put our chairs in a very nice place, so near the door and right behind that bulkhead—that's what he called it. It's a great protection from the wind."

"I'm sorry they aren't on the sunny side for your sake. I don't expect to spend much time up here myself. One thing, we are quite away from the crowd. I get so tired of the everlasting tramp, tramp. I hope they won't come round here much. Rachel can act as a duenna for you when I am not able to, but I am afraid you'll see more of your aunt and cousins than you want to. It is very strange your coming upon them so, after all these years!"

"Their seats are on the other side; I looked. My aunt is awfully nice to me," Mary said with sudden gravity. "She really did show a great deal of feeling when we met and I think she is fond of me already. I like her too, and Kitty is a nice, harmless little thing and very pretty; but I just *hate* Estelle. I can't tell you the way she affects me. I feel as Martin Luther must have when he threw that inkstand at the Devil. I do," relaxing from an expression so hard that Miss Newlin looked at her in astonishment, to a shamefaced smile. "And the worst of it is, I can't help seeing that I look *horribly like* her!"

Miss Newlin burst into one of her genial laughs and patted the hand on the arm of the chair beside her. "Don't worry," she said. "Your features are really a good deal in the same mould, but the expression is as different as day and night—and her eyes—" She seemed to consider words unequal to the task of comparison. "What would Mr.

Brown say to such a vindictive spirit?" with a quizzical, sidewise glance.

"John!" Mary smiled softly. "He is as good as gold himself, but he never expects anybody else to be, especially me—oh!"

She had glanced along the deck, and Miss Newlin attributed the sudden start and violent change of color to the fact that the obnoxious Estelle was bearing down upon them in the company of a man—a strikingly handsome man—in a long ulster and regulation steamer cap. Apparently they had come on this side to enjoy greater privacy in their stroll, for Miss Gill's face did not express unalloyed pleasure in the encounter. She had perfect command of herself, however, and it was not in her plan to be cool to Mary. Just now, too, she was in a state of high good humor and disposed to be condescending to all the world, even Mary, whose dislike she instinctively returned. She was convinced that Mr. Chandler, the best bred and best looking man she had ever met, had already succumbed to her own charms, and gave herself little self-satisfied "airs" in consequence. She had met him in Paris only a couple of weeks previously (a day or two before her meeting with this unknown cousin), and he had very soon begun to cultivate her society in a dignified way. She had not built high hopes on his somewhat cold courtesy until she suddenly discovered that he had changed his plans and was sailing home on their steamer. He had never been very communicative as to his own affairs, but she was sure his resolution to go home at once was a sudden one, and his choosing

that particular steamer "when he had no need for economy," was a very exciting coincidence.

She half halted a moment abreast of the two chairs behind the bulkhead and made a commonplace remark. It was no part of her plan, however, to introduce her companion just yet, and he may have seen that; for, after a moment's hesitation, and when Miss Gill was already moving forward, he stopped stock-still in front of Mary.

"Miss Farnham," he said, with entire self-possession and only an unusual spark in the brilliant gray eyes, as he stood uncovered before her. "You would hardly remember me, but I have a very clear memory of you, with a bucket in one hand and a basket in the other. It was a strenuous occasion."

Mary was no longer a child. She was not only a woman, but a woman with some experience of her own power; and her ease of manner was equal to his, in spite of her heightened color.

"I am sure you are not used to being so quickly forgotten. If you remember *my* muscle, I had much greater reason to remember yours. Miss Newlin," turning toward her companion with smiling readiness, "Mr. Chandler came to our assistance one time in the Adirondacks, when one of our guides hurt his arm on a long carry and we were stalled late in the afternoon. He carried the canoe on his back for half a mile."

Miss Newlin acknowledged the introduction with a certain primness, and her little brown eyes looked intently into the gray ones.

"Why, how exciting! I never knew you were

friends," Estelle Gill exclaimed with ill-concealed chagrin.

"We hardly had a chance to get so far as that," Mary said quietly, her smiling face touched with a spark of daring, "but we made a first-rate beginning."

Her hearers wore very different expressions as they turned to resume their walk.

"Mutual helpfulness is said to be a good foundation," Mr. Chandler said easily, as he replaced his cap. There was something very like gratitude in his face.

Before night settled down the "motion" was evident to others beside Miss Newlin, and next morning saw a scanty attendance at the long tables in the saloon. There were not more than seventy or eighty first-cabin passengers, and most of them had apparently not yet found their "sea legs," or, in common parlance, had not yet settled their *land stomachs*.

Father Neptune is a tremendous practical joker, and perhaps no one suffered more from his pranks than Estelle Gill when she learned from the much-enduring stewardess that Miss Farnham was "as bright as a lark;" but Miss Newlin was ill and the maid the worst off of all. She knew from Mr. Chandler that he was a stranger to sea-sickness, and for that day and the two or three that intervened before she could drag herself on deck, the greenish yellow tone of her complexion was not all due to that cause. When she did make her exit she was wise enough to cover her face with a heavy veil. Mary, who had busied herself with Miss Newlin and paid a visit to the forlorn Rachel, was very late at breakfast.

As she crossed the companion-way to the saloon, Mr. Chandler met her, rug on arm, on his way to the deck. At sight of her, the somewhat haughty repose of his face brightened marvelously.

"Ah, so you are not with the majority, after all!" he said, coming quickly toward her. He had no idea how significant that "after all" was.

"I'm very late," she said, innocently reading it aright. "I was looking after some of the 'majority.' "

An hour later, driven from her post of nurse into the open air by Miss Newlin's command, she ensconced herself in the sheltered corner and, carefully mummified by the zealous deck-steward, opened her book. Canvas was drawn over the rail as a protection from the flying spray and her view of the ocean was obscured except when the long, rolling swells brought her side down. She tried to bury herself in the time-honored novel in her hands, and at last succeeded, though her thoughts did occasionally wander to surmise as to the whereabouts of Mr. Chandler's chair. Her native frankness made her unashamed of the wish to know.

Suddenly he appeared before her around the bulk-head. He glanced down at her book. "I am interrupting something very interesting, I am afraid."

"No, I am glad to be interrupted." She turned the title toward him.

"'Vanity Fair!'" with a bright, half-amused smile. "Are you fond of Thackeray?"

He asked the question absently, his eyes more alive to her face than to her answer. A curt "No!" waked him to interest. "I'm not reading this because

I like it, but because I ought to like it. That seems to you bad taste, doesn't it?"

"Rather," he said smiling again. "Thackeray is a delight to me; but perhaps I understand your reasons. He is too much of a sceptic for you. You like to think better of human nature than he lets you?"

"Yes," Mary answered, surprised that a stranger should read her so well. "Because most human nature *is* better. I would like to have introduced Mr. Thackeray to some good honest Americans, and especially some American women. I've just been reading where little Georgie leaves his mother, without a pang, to go to his horrid old grandfather and make a splurge."

"And you think that is unnatural?"

"Perhaps not, if a boy had that kind of mother. She wasn't capable of doing anything but adore him and throw herself under his feet. She was deadly uninteresting, and I should think he might have liked a change."

Her hearer's face was calculated to draw her out as he leaned easily against the bulkhead looking down at her.

"You hear a lot of talk about woman's place being in the home, but some of those sweet, domestic women have no more idea how to *interest* a child when it begins to develop a mind than a nice old motherly hen. Motherliness, to me, doesn't mean just washing and cuddling and singing nursery songs and hearing prayers; but it means keeping in touch with the big interests of the world, and with your children's souls

and brains, as well as their hearts. Mr. Thackeray's '*angelical*' mothers didn't know anything about what was going on in the world. They had no perspective."

Mary's face was aglow with earnestness; her eyes beautiful with a sudden memory. Her mind had gone back to her father. Her hearer turned his own eyes away.

"Won't you sit down?" she said gently, recalled to herself by the sight of the fire she had kindled. He hesitated definitely, and then said simply, "I should like to."

"You'd better get your rug first," was her practical suggestion. A warm wave of color swept over his face as he went away without a word.

The deck-pacers were few that morning. One old man, his slouch hat tied under his chin with a silk handkerchief, looked hard at them as he went by, but they were too deep in conversation even to notice him. The luncheon bugle roused them and made Mary say contritely, "Oh, I ought to have gone down long ago. I am worried about Miss Newlin. She had a horrid attack of pain in her chest in Paris, and the doctor called it by some Latin name that means neuralgia of the heart, I think, and told me she must be very careful, and that it was important she shouldn't be seasick. He gave her a medicine to prevent it, but she must keep perfectly quiet. It is a very dangerous disease." She was unwinding her rugs with the help of the solicitous steward and did not see the look of startled intelligence on Mr. Chandler's face as he struggled to his feet.

"If I could do anything to help you at any time, it would be a great pleasure," he said with a solemnity that seemed disproportionate to the occasion.

Miss Newlin welcomed her with a tender smile that covered a close scrutiny. "You have been enjoying your book at last?" she asked.

"No," Mary answered, looking frankly in her face. "I have been talking to Mr. Chandler." She saw a cloud of uncertainty settle over Miss Newlin's strong features. She wished they were not so white.

"We were not flirting, Miss Newlin," she said, playfully, seating herself on the edge of the berth and kissing her friend on both cheeks to drive away the disapproval she read. "If you want to know what we were talking about most of the time, it was the Friends—Quakers. His grandparents were all Friends, and he says he thinks it the purest and noblest religion of all—or that it would have been if they hadn't cramped it by a lot of little formalities. He said they were beginning to find that out." She was running on in her wish to disarm Miss Newlin's distrust, but she did not quite succeed.

"You must run and get your lunch now," was all the answer she got.

"Those very handsome eyes know how to take one's measure pretty accurately, it seems," Miss Newlin said to herself, with a grim smile. "I guarantee he didn't talk religion to Miss Gill!"

She lay for some time with puckered brows that were not altogether caused by perplexity or dissatisfaction. There was a nasty, growling pain in her left arm and shoulder. She knew what it meant and

that her very life depended on extreme caution. "A violent attack of vomiting would end it all, I think," was her calm comment. "I must take no chances." A note was brought her by the stewardess. She asked for her glasses and opened it, turning at once to the signature.

"Old Mr. Marquand!" she exclaimed aloud in a voice of pleased surprise. "I shall enjoy seeing him again if I ever get on deck."

She turned the note again and commenced it, but in a moment her face had changed darkly and she read to the end with feverish haste. Then she closed her eyes and lay still, while a dull crimson of excitement gradually spread over her face.

"Why, Miss Newlin, how flushed you look. What is the matter?" Mary's voice suddenly asked from the doorway. Miss Newlin grasped the letter and crushed it in her fingers as though to hide it, before she realized the futility of the attempt. Mary was thoroughly alarmed at her appearance and at once took a bottle from one of the little barricaded shelves on top of the washstand and dropped several drops of the liquid into a medicine glass which she hurriedly filled. "Drink this," she said, in her usual positive fashion, lifting Miss Newlin's unresisting head on her strong young arm. The imperious, masterful woman was as wax in the hands of this girl, who made the sunshine of her life.

There was absolute silence for a few minutes, while Mary passed her cool hand across the flushed forehead and cheeks. The effect of the drops was almost instantaneous. The color receded.

"Read this, dear," Miss Newlin said, smoothing out the letter again and handing it to her anxious nurse.

She watched Mary's face narrowly while the long lashes drooped and rose again at a turned page.

"Old busybody!" was the first vexed exclamation. "I suppose he meant it all right though." She paused a moment and lifted her eyes quietly to Miss Newlin's. "I knew all that before."

"And you never told me!"

"I never thought of meeting him; certainly not of talking to him as I have this morning. It was not my secret, but I should have told you something very soon. I really never ought to have heard what I did." Mary proceeded at once to give the substance of Ellen Logan's story. Miss Newlin listened with deep interest, but the anxiety on her brow did not smooth away.

"Don't let him sit by you again or draw you into intimate conversation. A nature like yours makes a famous champion. I know your motives are above suspicion; but, dear child, you are not a fit person to undertake the conversion or consolation of that sort of sinner."

"Miss Newlin, you surely couldn't be afraid of my losing my *heart* to him! You must know that——" the rest of the sentence was buried in the pillow beside Miss Newlin's cheek.

"I am very thankful, Mary," she said in a low, uncertain voice, "and I will trust you, dearest. You are not a foolish child, but a good woman. But you are very young—and——"

Mary readily promised moderation, and Miss

Newlin's health made sufficient excuse for her absenting herself from the deck a good deal without seeming to do so for a purpose. She also paid daily calls upon her aunt.

The intimacy so begun progressed rapidly, however, and Mary could not hope to escape comment and never thought of trying. On the contrary she took pains to treat Mr. Chandler with especial friendliness when the decks began to fill up; and never missed long daily promenades with him.

But he read the difference in her and made a bold resolve.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DISEASE "WITH A LATIN NAME"

A PERFECT day above and a quiet sea below had emboldened Miss Newlin to risk a journey to the deck, and she was reclining in her corner, fed by Mary on morsels as tempting and digestible as the bill-of-fare afforded, while she drew deep breaths of the fresh sea air.

"No one knows how good it is to be out again," she said, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, as she chewed contentedly on a bit of chicken. "It did seem as though I should smother, sometimes."

"You have such a good color! And your eyes are as bright as usual," Mary said, looking affectionately into the strong, dark face encircled by a "nubia" of a violent bluish pink calculated to have taken the color out of a milkmaid's cheeks. (Milkmaids always have red cheeks, haven't they?) Miss Newlin's love of gay colors was as inborn as her lack of judgment in their use.

"That's enough. Now go down to your own lunch. I shall be as comfortable and happy as can be in this heavenly air." Left alone, her face took on a singularly uplifted and ennobled gravity as her eyes swept the blue, calm expanse before her. A voice broke jarringly upon her reverie.

"Miss Newlin, may I come and talk to you for a little?"

The tone and words were simple enough, but there was something in Mr. Chandler's face that made her conscious of a disagreeable foreboding. "Why should he want to talk to her, an old woman whom he had barely met." She assented with a coldness that did not escape him. Very little *did* escape him. He seated himself on the raised foot-rest of Mary's chair, almost facing Miss Newlin. She noticed the unconscious tenderness with which he touched the tumbled heap of rugs in moving them aside. It was painfully suggestive. Suddenly he raised a face of such passionate earnestness that his listener waited spellbound, her sombre eyes on his. She had not long to wait.

"Do you believe it is possible for one to love with every fiber of his being all that is pure and good, and yet be a miserable failure in even the common task of clean and honest living?"

He had taken Miss Newlin's measure, too. Her whole nature responded to a challenge so given. There was an almost unearthly beauty in her plain face as she answered with an intensity equal to his own.

"We *must* believe so if we trust St. Paul's witness: 'For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.' " She saw his face quiver, but his eyes did not flinch.

"Will you let me tell you something about myself?" he asked huskily.

She only nodded; her absorbed attention answered for her.

"When I was twenty-one, I fell in love—as deeply as I was capable of falling in love—with a married woman. I did not try to fight it. It seemed as though the very strength of my feeling were a justification. I was not vulgar. I was as innocent as a girl and intensely religious in my nature, but there was a big force there beside. She was a few years older than I and was unhappy in her marriage. It is no use to go through it all again. I seemed to be drawn into sin with an irresistible force, and everything conspired to pull me down." His lips curled with tremulous sarcasm. "No doubt every sinner has said the same since the world began."

Miss Newlin made no answer. Her face was contracted with a sympathy that was as strong as pain.

"I knew I was breaking a commandment, but the laws of nature seemed stronger than the laws of Moses. Then came a divorce suit in which the husband's case was absolutely perfect, and I found that for weeks we had been spied upon with consummate ingenuity. Every word we had spoken, every—I cannot think of it even now. Miss Newlin, Hester Prynne only wore the scarlet letter on her *clothing*. It was branded into my very soul by the revelations of that trial. Every fact was distorted, every emotion vulgarized. *She* took refuge in blank denial. I tried to keep silence, for I cared nothing for 'contempt of court,' but silence was as damning to her as words would have been. I ended by backing her up." He breathed like a man who has been running. "Of

course, the lies were proved against us. The men who had shown me sympathy at first grew cold—all but one, an old man who died not long after. He took me aside by the arm and said: 'Mr. Chandler, there is the making of a man in you. The Lord forgives such perjury as that.' I never forgot the words, but the fact of being a proven liar before the world cut me deeper than anything. I had always been proud of my truth-telling. A lie under oath was no different to me from any other kind—I had the Quaker traditions—but what I suffered for those I told in that court, killed every atom of the love I had for her. Afterward I wrote, offering to marry her as soon as or wherever the laws would permit it. She never answered the letter. She refused to see me. It was the kindest thing she could have done; but it made me even more morose and full of gall than I should have been."

Miss Newlin's face was expressive of physical as well as mental pain and her hand went to her heart. Mr. Chandler looked at her in sudden alarm.

"I ought not to stir you up with this wretched story," he said penitently. "Can't I get you something?" He half rose.

"No, no; go on."

He hesitated, watching her face, but finally complied.

"If I might have confided then in such a woman as you," he said, with a sigh, which quickly gave place to a mocking smile. "I expected social ostracism, but I found myself received with open arms by women of good family and position, of what is called the

'gay set,' and inundated with invitations. There was a good deal of real kindness among them, but I soon discovered that it was not only the sinner they were willing to pardon; they condoned the sin. Every honest instinct in me was outraged by the sort of tacit complicity. I stayed away from social functions and moped in the bitterest spirit it is possible for a man to feel. I was only a boy after all. My sister was an angel to me, but I knew I could not make her understand. I let her think I was suffering from thwarted love. The after-taste of dead passion is far worse."

Again he looked in Miss Newlin's flushed and frowning face with eager solicitude. "Forgive me!" he said brokenly. "I am sure you know why I am telling you what I never told anyone before, but I will say no more now. Let me stay here with you in quiet till your maid or Miss Farnham comes back."

"If you will get a little water and drop five drops of this into it," Miss Newlin said, pressing her hand again to her heart. "I ate more than usual and perhaps——"

"And I have excited you right on top of it," he said, crimsoning with mortification and anxiety, as he called a steward and sent him for the water. They sat in unbroken silence till the man returned and Mr. Chandler administered the stimulant—even for a few minutes after. Miss Newlin felt they were losing precious time. The luncheon-eaters would soon be back.

"I am all right now. I want to hear the rest before we are interrupted," she said commandingly.

He hesitated again, but saw that it would irritate her to refuse, and went on very calmly.

"After a year or two of sulking, the hot blood began to work in me again. I began to long for society. I found plenty of it ready, and I ended by accepting things as I found them. For five years I stifled the craving for a higher plane of living. I met a woman—a divorced woman nearly my own age,—witty, intellectual, more fascinating than most *beautiful* women (she wasn't even passable), and we soon became intimate. She made me feel that we were congenial spirits of a finer clay than the others. I was not *in love* with her, but—" his face expressed a scornful indulgence for his old self, mixed with shame and pain—"you will not think me a coxcomb, Miss Newlin, for telling you that she *was* in love with me; so much so that she disregarded the commonest prudence. For years we were an open book to the whole social world. Part of it cut us dead, but we had plenty of company. Our connection soon began to gall me horribly—men are brutal egotists for the most part: whatever they can get easily, they soon cease to care for. I had the manhood to try to hide my defection, but those things can't be hid long. I even offered to marry her, but she was too clever. She was a past-mistress in the art of creating fire out of ashes, but the ashes got too hopeless, and for years, while the world looked on us as happy in defiance of its laws, we were as wretched as we could well be. At last she put an end to it. I have not seen her since. I gave up women's society altogether and went nowhere but on sporting expeditions or to

athletic contests. I traveled a great deal. I was thoroughly unhappy, but I had learned to accept things as I found them. There is good in everyone, and I grew confused in my standards. I had found fine impulses in men and women who were notoriously fast, and I had a contempt for prudes. Many a young girl has given me side glances from under her mother's wing that were very enlightening. I began to think the world was made up of people who frankly followed their natural impulses and those who were hypocrites enough to act virtue and pretend scorn." He was looking moodily down on his interlaced fingers; suddenly he raised his eyes and an extraordinary change passed over his face.

"One day, just three years ago, I came face to face with a girl—I need not describe her—if ever eyes were 'windows of the soul,' hers are"—he stopped a moment to gain composure. "She looked straight at me and I recognized the unattainable good. The craving for it had always haunted a corner of my stained soul, and all the faith of my boyhood seemed to come back in a flash and I saw the life I was living in its true light. It was a wonderful experience. It made a different man of me. I did not break with all my old acquaintances, but it changed my whole attitude toward life. I was never what is called dissipated; I never drank much nor gambled. Low resorts had never had any temptation for me."—Another pause. Miss Newlin unaffectedly dried her eyes. "I saw her again by chance—very seldom—. I never tried to meet her. I knew I had no right to her acquaintance, but I have kept in touch with her

and known all that happened to her and worshiped her from afar as a good Catholic worships the Virgin Mary." He colored warmly as he pronounced the name.

"It is a wonderful story," Miss Newlin said in a low, thrilled voice; "and I can hardly express all the sympathy and interest I feel; but——" A tremor of pain that was not physical crossed her eloquent face.

"I know what you will say. I have no right to touch the hem of her skirt."

"No, I do not say that. Who are we to refuse forgiveness where our Lord forgave. I acknowledge that I have warned her against you; but she has a very strong will, with all her sweetness; and I have found it best to give her a long rein. I can trust her honor absolutely, but she is a creature of impulse where her deeper feelings are stirred and——" she stopped. She had almost said: "and you are perilously attractive."

"I told you I had not meant to meet her," Mr. Chandler went on. "Indeed, I was afraid at first that something in me that seemed to draw out the wrong side of women would draw out some hidden quality in her and spoil the idea of her I had in my mind. Afterward, I found that there *were* women, of fine quality, who seemed willing to give me their friendship, and I wanted no more. I was resolved never to marry.

"When I saw Miss Farnham in Paris—she did not see me—I recognized that she was a woman now and a woman capable of deciding for herself. It came to me all at once that if I laid bare my heart to her—

after I had gained her confidence by quiet acquaintance—she might be one of the women who can forgive without loss of self-respect and purity. The temptation was so great that I made all my plans; especially as chance had favored me by introducing me to her aunt and cousins. It was the cousin's likeness to her that made me seek the introduction in the first place, feeling sure there must be a blood tie. It didn't take long to discover that there was no other kind. The soul that looks out of Miss Gill's windows is of a very different sort."

At that moment they were favored by a good chance for comparison, for the two girls emerged from the companionway together, Estelle smiling sweetly and falsely under the raised veil. She had kept her family at the luncheon table as long as possible, in the hope of Mr. Chandler's appearing, little dreaming that by so doing she was playing straight into his hand. Mary's expression was of unmistakably pleased surprise when she saw the two together, evidently in interested conversation; not so Estelle's, although she made a very good attempt at a pleasant smile, and there were solid reasons why her soft pink color did not change.

"Mary, dear, Mr. Chandler has been keeping me company and entertaining me so well that I hope he will be willing to tell me more soon. We old maids never get too far along to enjoy attention from interesting men."

Mary was too much astonished even to be pleased. She turned to Mr. Chandler with unconscious inquiry in her face, but he only smiled. His heightened color

might easily have come from gratification at the compliment paid him.

* * * * *

One calm, blue day followed another, till there were but two left of that memorable voyage.

Miss Newlin had graced the deck from morning till night, though the "nubia" had at last to be discarded because of the extreme mildness of the weather. For more than selfish reasons she blessed the quiet sea. On deck she could take the helm of affairs and disarm offensive criticism of Mary by her apparent sanction of the acquaintance with Mr. Chandler, who was far too politic to follow the bent of his inclinations, and to all outward appearance divided his attentions equally between the two girls and between the mother and chaperon. Miss Newlin's anxiety was bad for that disease "with a Latin name," and she was forced to have frequent recourse to heart stimulants, though there were no more exciting confidences. She had told Mr. Chandler that even if she wished it, she had no power to forbid Mary's listening to him. "But her guardian has; you must go to him," she added, with a fresh twinge of the ever-present pain that the thought of such a contingency brought her. Mary's confession had been balm to her troubled spirit, but the doubt would rise when she saw Mr. Chandler with her, whether loyalty to John might not be weakened in spite of herself. "If I were a girl and he looked at me as he does at her, I wonder whether I could make a sane choice," she said to herself, comparing the handsome, clean-cut features before her with John's large rough-hewn ones. "If he were only

here, his influence would be strong enough, I feel sure but——." Why had fate decreed that the love of so many men should be showered upon one innocent woman, who could satisfy but one? She recalled Edward Logan's parting last year and Jack Wurts' long journey to try his fate a second time.

"I seem to see Mr. Brown's impatience as we get slowly nearer, Mary. Only two more days now." She watched Mary's face covertly and was reassured to see it quiver and flush, but—"perilously attractive" had not been too strong a word for John's present rival.

"I believe I love him myself," was Miss Newlin's grudging admission, "and it hurts me to think of the pain that must come to one or the other."

"Only one day now," she said next morning; "but I do wish this storm could have waited. I'm afraid the bromide isn't going to have enough effect."

A night of thunder-storms had again made a very rough sea, and Miss Newlin's fears were not groundless. An hour later, a fit of nausea was followed by an attack of pain that frightened Mary and the faithful Rachel beyond power of concealment.

"I am easier now," Miss Newlin said, trying to smile as she looked with dull eyes into Mary's tear-filled ones. "My dear little girl, your life has been very full of anxiety. It is the penalty of loving." She closed her eyes. "It will soon be over now and port will be more welcome than ever before."

A few minutes later there was a quick sobbing breath, a short, violent struggle, as with a throttling enemy, and she had entered "the haven where we all would be."

CHAPTER XXXV

"PERILOUSLY ATTRACTIVE"

WHEN in the years to come the waking nightmare of that home-coming should recur to Mary's mind, its every incident must stand in the light of one all-pervading personality. It was Mr. Chandler who arranged everything, who reassured her when no waiting figure was to be seen towering above the crowd as they drew up to the dock and who went at once in search of news. Finding the Brown's and Raymond's houses closed, and no George at the Art Club, he himself accompanied the mortal remains of Miss Newlin to her brother's home in Delaware, and the mute plea of his expressive eyes induced Mary to accept her aunt's invitation to go with them to the Aldine Hotel instead of going at once to Catharine. She told herself with rare want of candor that her willingness to fall in with this plan was owing to the greater accessibility of the city in her effort to get word of John, and the reason was plausible enough to hoodwink even so straightforward a conscience as hers.

Fate had been too strong for Mr. Chandler and he had abandoned all pretense of neutrality in his homage; but he knew, and he managed to let Mary know, that it would not do for him to go out to Fernwood

as he might to a hotel. He was willing for the present to let his attentions seem (to Mary herself) no more than were justified by the urgency of her need. Yet, with all her grief for Miss Newlin and anxiety about John, she could not misunderstand. She was accepting a great deal from a stranger, but he had become in that short time almost an intimate friend, and to warn him off when he had given her no “*absolute proof*” of more than friendly feeling would have been, she argued, both ungrateful and ridiculous.

Her heavy heart grew heavier with each hour and she dimly knew that in part of that dull pain neither John nor Miss Newlin had any share. In the quiet of her own room she took out the worn, blue leather case, her constant companion, and gazed through blinding tears into the beloved face. She had told Miss Newlin the simple truth. Her heart was so full of this one deep feeling, there could be, she felt sure, no chance for another to come between. Yet she pressed her face against John’s pictured one, as though this firm anchor of actual contact could keep her from drifting out on some unknown sea.

Mrs. Gill, like a true mother, was so sure of her own daughter’s greater beauty and sprightliness and style that she did not even look on pale, dispirited Mary as a dangerous rival, except for the knowledge that there is attraction to a strong man in a woman’s dependence upon him. Mary was calm enough and executive enough in all her trouble to have set on foot all the necessary agencies with regard to Miss Newlin and to finding John; but it was pleasant to lean on a congenial strength. Miss Gill had much clearer

vision than her mother and recognized the true state of the case with a concentrated jealousy capable of all that Mary had ever accredited her with and more than Mary's pure mind was able to conceive of.

One consideration—the fact that it might be compromising to her to be seen in such relations to a man whose past record was well-known in his own city—Mary put from her with a scorn as noble as it was imprudent. Her attitude was the very opposite of Mrs. Gill's tolerance, which rested entirely on the gentleman's social standing—his birthright, and his evidently easy circumstances. She had already found out that he was rich.

Before that first nightfall on land, Mr. Chandler, following Mary's suggestions, had succeeded in learning from a neighboring grocer that Mr. Brown had gone away more than a week ago—somewhere in the far west, he thought—and that the servants had only closed the house a few days before.

Mary sent a telegram to Hannah Patterson at Lebanon on the chance of finding her there, and another to George Raymond, whose whereabouts was quickly discovered to be in the Pocono Mountains—only a few hours away. There was no reply that night. "There would probably be some delay, as local offices were apt to close early in out-of-the-way places."

Toward noon next day, came a message from her old friend Hannah, so confused through excess of feeling as to be almost unintelligible, but holding one clear fact: John had gone to British Columbia on business. Still no word from George, but as she came

out of the Aldine restaurant with her aunt, after a vain attempt to eat her lunch, a hurrying bell-boy approached her and handed her a card. One glance at it sent the color surging over her white face. “Where is the gentleman?” she said quietly. A minute later she was standing with both her hands in George Raymond’s strong clasp, while his eager eyes took in all the changes of the eighteen months since he had seen her, and especially the sad changes of these last days.

His questions must be answered first, and in the process, her aunt’s name came out and Mr. Chandler’s. She saw the pained surprise on his face at hearing of her present connection with the Gills, of whose existence he had heard from John, and the startled gravity with which he received the first mention of Mr. Chandler’s name.

Then came his turn, and he explained the nature of the business that had taken John to that remote, uninhabited woodland district, and the extra precautions he had taken to have all letters or telegrams forwarded. “He has probably found much greater difficulties than he thought,” George said seriously. “Your cablegram telling of your sudden start home must have reached here a day or two after he left and has somehow missed him. Of course, he was not expecting a cable, but he would be sure to inquire for mail at each stop. He was going abroad as soon as all this necessary business of his mother’s estate was settled, and went west at once on that account. You know Mrs. Brown’s father was a Canadian and he owned land in two or three places that he took for

speculation. He came to Philadelphia to study medicine and fell in love and settled here. Mrs. Brown's will left all that real estate, or the proceeds of it, to Episcopal Missions, and it means a great deal of work for John. There is some of it north of Montreal or Quebec. I sent a telegram this morning to New Westminster, the nearest telegraph station, telling of Miss Newlin's death and your home-coming, and that I was on my way to you." He wrote down the address and gave it to her.

"I don't know just how far from the town he may be, but I imagine some distance, and where he is there are no roads. Mail would have to be taken by woodsmen on foot."

Mary explained that her aunt had seemed pleased to have her with them, but that she meant to go to Catharine the following week, when the Gills would probably start for their home near Cleveland. She spoke of Mr. Chandler's kindness, not without a certain self-consciousness, both by reason of her own present relation to him and because of that connection with Miss Hutchinson, and the memory of George's face at the cricket match years ago, when he had seen them together.

"I should be glad to go down with you," George said warmly, when she told him the day and hour of Miss Newlin's funeral. He saw her hesitate and color, then she said simply, "Mr. Chandler has planned to go with me."

"But I may go too, mayn't I?"

She saw a quiet purpose in his face, and understood. She was not offended, for she knew George's natural

modesty and that his hardihood now was for John's sake, but it stirred up that persistent pain. The cross-roads that she dreaded were coming near. George's manner was perfect toward the man whom he yet deliberately relegated to a position of supernumerary, on that sad journey. His jaws were squarely set as he watched Mary's treatment of this new acquaintance.

"I believe no woman is able to resist him," he said bitterly to himself, thinking of John and his patient waiting, and of his own failure where he had seen Mr. Chandler steadily gaining ground.

The following day he came to Mary with a very bright face and a yellow envelope in his hand:

"Starting home at once; I know you will do all you can for Mary. My love and sympathy to her."

A very ordinary little message, but enough for Mary. Yet she had not seen John closeted half the night in a logging cabin with two strange specimens of humanity, who regarded him as coming down with a fever. That it seemed only to sharpen his wits made them none the less anxious, and it was with genuine solicitude that they saw him start before daylight on the long return tramp, with the guide who had brought in the message. Only two things, they argued, could excite a man like that (yet he was "damned cool-headed, too"). It wasn't likely that he had done murder and the law was on his tracks; he didn't seem just like that; yet that might cause the red and white trembling fit that had come on him when he got that telegram! The other alternative seemed almost

equally improbable. They had seen men take on so when another fellow had gone off with their girl, but this one was too old and settled. Why, he might be forty! And forty in their social code was the beginning of old age, and should be dead to passion.

"John won't lose any time," George said emphatically, "but the soonest he can possibly get here will be a week. This message is sent from a place that isn't in the Art Club gazetteer, but he would come by the Canadian Pacific, I should think; unless he could get a faster train by going to Seattle."

George had been presented to the Gill family and had been agreeably surprised, especially with the mother. It was ungrateful of him to feel cool toward Estelle, for her handsome eyes had conveyed unmistakable messages of encouragement and she had hoped to arouse Mr. Chandler's jealousy by flirting with this "awfully" good-looking man. Mr. Chandler's defection rankled in the inmost depths of all the heart she had, and "hell has no fury like a woman scorned." It was no mere blow to her self-love and vanity. The passionate pain that filled her with gall and fire was the most intense emotion her cold nature had ever known.

The weather, which had been unusually cool after those heavy electric storms, was beginning to warm up uncomfortably, and the city seemed a very undesirable loitering place; yet wild horses could not have dragged Estelle from the spot yet.

"Couldn't we go somewhere for the day where it is cool?" she had suggested at breakfast that morning. Mary had begged them to leave her out of the

question. She would not move from the hotel while there was a chance of an answer to George's telegram. Both girls were inclined to sulk over this calmly expressed decision.

"It's abominably selfish when she knows we wouldn't go and leave her," was Estelle's biting comment, delivered hardly out of earshot of Mary, who, though she did not catch the muttered words, knew very well what was their temper. She begged her aunt to leave her at home alone; but when Mrs. Gill was on the point of yielding, rather than disappoint her darlings, an emphatic refusal from Estelle settled the matter. That young woman had no notion of leaving her rival a fair field and she had a conviction that Mary's presence would be needed to insure someone else's. She sauntered into the room just as George was calculating John's chances of speed, and offered congratulations in a voice as hearty and sincere as Bernhardt herself could have managed.

"Now, Mary, you won't mind going out of town," she said sweetly. "I have been talking to the clerk, and he says Valley Forge is just as pretty as it can be and awfully interesting, and none of us have been there. Mr. Raymond, couldn't you go out there with us this afternoon? We can take our supper with us and have a picnic, for it's bright moonlight to come home."

George glanced at Mary's unresponsive face and hesitated a moment.

"My cousin from Bryn Mawr is here calling now, and I know he'd go, and I'm sure Mr. Chandler would. We can send a note to the Rittenhouse Club at once."

George's short-lived hesitation was over. "I should be very glad to go," he said, smiling, "and it is a perfectly beautiful country and full of interest. You've been out there, haven't you, Mary?"

"No," Mary said, without enthusiasm. John had meant to take her there some time. This picnic was a very different thing, and the idea of anything approaching a merry-making was *almost* as distasteful to her as her cousin's share in it.

"Why don't I go to Catharine to-day?" she asked, the mournful eyes gazing back into hers from the looking-glass. "Now that Mr. Raymond is going, I couldn't"—she checked herself and those honest eyes in the glass filled with slow tears—"Because I want to be with Mr. Chandler"—they said bravely—"and Mr. Raymond knows it."

CHAPTER XXXVI

A MODERN SIEGE AT VALLEY FORGE

MRS. GILL was suffering from a severe headache, and before the starting hour, three o'clock, was obliged to go to bed instead of preparing for the excursion. Kitty declared her intention of staying with her mother, for she was both affectionate and unselfish (a complete tool in the hands of her cleverer sister); but Estelle would not permit it, and Kitty accompanied her and Mary downstairs in a subdued frame of mind. The only gay member of the trio was Estelle, who had planned a campaign in which she cleverly foresaw George Raymond's hearty co-operation. She had found it up-hill work using George as a stimulus to Mr. Chandler's jealousy of herself; she would use him as a barrier between the other two, and with her sister to engage the "stupid" cousin, when it came to pairing (and she would see that it did come to pairing), it would be strange indeed if George did not relieve her of all care of Mary.

The three men were in friendly conversation in the big hotel lobby. George was acknowledging to himself that he would have liked Mr. Chandler very much if he had not been such a "fire-brand." When he saw the look on the thoroughbred face as it turned to greet Mary, and the quick response in hers, he felt

inclined to wish himself a knight of those romantic days when a fair one might be spirited away and held captive for good ends as well as evil.

"I believe I might keep him from breaking John's heart first and hers after," he thought, yet without vindictiveness—rather with a sad wonder whether the man really knew the devil's power that was in him. "He doesn't *mean* her any harm now, that's certain. He looks as though he wanted to fall down and worship her! If any woman ever could have power to reform a man, she might!"—but the thought of John choked him. So absorbed was he in his somber musing that he did not notice a messenger till the boy stood squarely in front of him, touching his cap and holding out a telegram. "You're Mr. Raymond, ain't you?"

George admitted his identity with a look of one suddenly waked from sleep. He opened the envelope, read the few words, and a flush of annoyance—or of something deeper—rushed over his face.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, turning to Mary instead of to Estelle. "My mother has been having trouble with a tooth and Emma says she is coming down to the dentist this afternoon. They arrive at Broad Street at 6.11, so it will be out of the question for me to go with you." Mary was heartily sorry and looked it. Estelle's conventional expressions of regret were but a faint show of the chagrin that filled her soul.

The indecision on both faces made George hope, for one anxious moment, that the whole expedition would be put off till another day, since they were

minus a chaperon; but his unkind wish was doomed to disappointment. Mary stood like some passive instrument in the hands of fate, and, as usual, Estelle took command of the strangely assorted party.

It would be odd if she could not play her cards successfully once they were away. Anything was better than the rest of the afternoon and evening in the hot city! She never gave a thought to her mother. "Well, we must be off if we're going to catch the train," she said, decidedly, and George saw the quick flash in one pair of eyes.

Mr. Chandler had taken the precaution of telegraphing for an open coach for the party, and the jog-trot drive in the late afternoon was full of interest and enjoyment. He constituted himself leader and managed to hold each one with the charm of his personality and the extent of his information. Mary was bewitched into complete enjoyment, as they listened to anecdotes of Washington's army and that thrilling winter, while they sat in the woods over their picnic supper. Tom Gill decided that his cousins were lucky to pick up a man like Mr. Chandler. "He's the best fellow I've met in a long while," he said to Kitty *sotto voce*. "But he's no go for Estelle. He's dead stuck on Miss Farnham." Kitty looked incredulous. The idea that he was more than kind to Mary in her trouble had not occurred to her, and she thought of him as already Estelle's property.

Estelle, however, was wide awake; and impartial as Mr. Chandler might try to make his attentions to-day, she saw that every little civility to Mary was charged with an electric current of restrained tender-

ness and passion, and a very demon of pain and hate took possession of her heart.

"Do you feel energetic enough to walk up to the observatory and see the sunset view?" Mr. Chandler asked of the company in general, though his eyes involuntarily turned to Mary.

"Oh, dear, no, it's too hot, and we've got to walk to the station," Miss Gill answered tartly, forgetting her amiable *rôle* for the moment. It had been Mary's suggestion to send the coach back when they stopped for supper and Estelle had not dared to oppose it. Her abrupt speech now made Mr. Chandler color slightly.

"I am sorry we didn't keep the coach," he said courteously.

"Oh, not for me," Estelle's temper was getting away with her. She had a naturally good complexion, and it had taken two or three years of late hours and irregular habits to reduce the healthful bloom which was Kitty's strongest present claim to good looks. Of late her rest had been spoiled by cankering, passionate jealousy, and she was forced to hide the ravages by every art in her power. "Mary looks like a ghost," Mrs. Gill had remarked that morning. "If it wasn't for a certain something about her she would hardly be pretty any more."

"She's perfectly washed out, and her eyes are as dull as fishes," was Estelle's cousinly answer.

"But Mr. Chandler doesn't seem to notice her looks," she added to herself. "I believe he likes her all the better with circles under her eyes and that die-away air."

The spiteful pain was not lessened this afternoon by the fact that she had been incautious enough to trust to Madame Élise's recommendation of a "water-proof" coloring matter for the cheeks, and that she was on "pins and needles" ever since a covert trial with her handkerchief had shown her her danger. Then, too, she saw Mary's pale cheeks and heavy eyes vanishing before the interest and pleasure that were quickened in her. There was no lack of color or life in her face as she shook the crumbs from her napkin and sprang up. "I should like to go ever so much! Come on, Kitty. It's only a little distance from here." Kitty, who always followed the strongest lead, was preparing to get on her feet, when a sly pull at her gown and a low "cut it, Kit," from her cousin changed her purpose. Estelle saw and it added fuel to her fire, but she said in a quiet, unconcerned voice, "you know the train goes at 7.28 and there isn't another from this benighted place. You'll have to hurry pretty hard to get back. I think we'll stroll on down and take our time."

"I know a shorter cut from the observatory, by the road along the dam," Mr. Chandler said with equal calmness, though there was a traitorous shining in his eyes. "We will go back that way and join you at the station."

Mary was a little frightened at the result of her own impulse, but Mr. Chandler walked quietly by her side, making only trite comments on scenery and wood. He stopped from time to time and collected a handful of tiny roadside greenery—there were no flowers. Mary grew more at her ease as he called her

attention to the spores on a little fern, and opened a seed-pod with the blade of his penknife. The subtle charm of his companionship was mixed with dull pain, with a sense of impending crisis. She was very silent.

When they reached the observatory, he asked if she did not want a breathing space before starting the climb, and she saw that he was rather pale than flushed and that his whole face was changed, as with a solemn purpose. She only shook her head as she gathered her light skirt about her with one hand. Mr. Chandler started up at once, leaving her to follow. He paused at the landings, and she felt his eyes on her face as he waited for her to recover her breath, but it was not the steep climb that was troubling it. "Why had she come?" she asked herself. "Partly to spite Estelle, perhaps, but not only for that." Now she wished herself away and yet—. She tried to talk as they came out on the uppermost platform and gazed over the rich panorama of harvested fields and midsummer woods, with glimpses of the winding river and the white lines of road dividing the waving corn. The beauty and peace of it all under the level rays of the fast sinking sun made her attempt at small talk fall hushed. She yielded to an irresistible power and stood beside him without a word.

"I am sorry the sun is going to be too late for us." It was he who finally broke the silence.

Mary started and looked at him. "How long will it take us to walk to the station?" she asked quickly.

"I am not sure. I should think not more than twenty minutes. He drew out his watch and uttered an exclamation as he saw that the hands already

pointed to ten minutes past seven, but Mary said composedly, "I suppose we might as well start. We don't want to rush, and Estelle said the train left at 7.48. It is so *beautiful*!" with a long-drawn sigh as her eyes bade farewell to the loveliness all about her. She did not see Mr. Chandler's lips open impulsively and close again and a vivid flush pass over his face. He had not misunderstood the train's starting time, but he yielded to a sudden strong temptation and said nothing. He would get the coach again and drive to Phoenixville or Paoli. There would be a moon. He tried to smother the secret hope that the others might not wait for them. It was a very small hope, but intoxicating. He could hardly misconstrue Mary's silence or studied effort at talk as they started down the steep woodpath to the spring where they were to join the road by the long pond or dam. It was getting dark here and seemed darker after the dazzling light on top of the tower. He went a little ahead, holding back an obtrusive branch from time to time, but he did not try to talk. There was a spell upon them both.

Mary suddenly stumbled and fell forward and he turned and caught her. Then, even in the dim light he saw that her eyes were full of tears, and in a moment his arms were round her and he had kissed her passionately on averted cheek and hair and where the tantalizing tiny rings escaped to nestle against her white throat. She tried to loose herself. He let her go at once and she sank down in a little heap on the moss and stones beside the path and buried her face in her hands.

"Forgive me," he said, panting and hoarse. "The temptation was great, and—I love you. I——"

"And you thought I would not mind." The low, shamed voice was full of unmistakable pain.

"I thought——" he made no effort to help her up. "I have been mad enough to hope lately that you were growing to care for me too—that you might be willing to be my wife some day, little as I deserved such a happiness. Was I *altogether* wrong? Don't you love me at all, Mary?"

"Oh, no!" she said vehemently, "I don't love you; I mustn't love you! I love John. I have always loved him. Oh——" with a sudden sob—"it isn't possible to love *two* men at once?"

Mr. Chandler's set, white face relaxed, and it was not strange that hope revived in him. He thought he understood.

"Have you given a promise of some sort to your guardian?"

"No, John has never spoken to me of such things——" even in the semi-darkness he saw the crimson color flood her face. She made an attempt to rise and he gave her his hand. He felt hers tremble.

"Mr. Chandler," she said, as she stood beside him in the narrow path, with downcast face and quivering lips. "I have been wrong not to let you know before this, that—that I belonged to John; that I *want* to belong to him—but"—the words were evidently very hard for her—"I—I wanted you near me. I was afraid you would go away and——" He forced himself to take no advantage of the reluctant admission. "Oh, I think I shall never marry anybody, but I see

now"—the thrill of his passionate kisses was still in her veins—"it is best for you to go."

Mr. Chandler should be forgiven if he made a firm resolution to stay. He opened his lips to answer her, but a shrill sound broke the twilight stillness and made them both start. It was the whistle of the down train.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A STRANGE PROPOSAL

“**W**HERE is she, George?”

The words accompanied the warm, strong handclasp which was to serve for all other greeting.

“At Catharine’s—but John, you *must* sit down five minutes. There are some things”—George broke off abruptly, frightened by the sudden pallor that replaced the eager glow on his friend’s face. How could he ever prepare John for what he feared was coming; for what had already come!

John searched his face with eyes that tried to penetrate his very soul. “Is something wrong?” he asked in a level voice, putting one trembling hand on the back of the office chair. “Is she ill?”

George took a step toward him and stopped.

“No, no, she is well; but don’t look at me like that! I am bungling terribly. I hope there is no harm done that may not be remedied; but it is a long story and you must let me begin at the beginning. Sit down!” The same feeling that prompted that push would have meant his arms around John’s neck had they been girls. For one moment John’s face was buried in his hands; then he raised it. “Go on,” he said quietly.

George told what he knew of Mary's meeting with her aunt and Mr. Chandler.

"You remember old Marquand, don't you?"

John nodded, the pain in his face was touched with amazement at the digression.

"Well, he came to see me yesterday and told me what I want to tell you. He crossed on the steamer with them all, and he said it was very rough for a few days at starting and Mary was the only one of the whole party who was not seasick, and that Mr. Chandler soon singled her out and the very first morning he was *tête-à-tête* with her for hours in a retired part of the deck. Marquand has good reason to know something of Chandler's history—it was his niece that—but he said even if Mr. Chandler had known *him* he was too absorbed to have noticed him. He took it upon himself to write a warning note to Miss Newlin, whom he had known long before, but it had little effect. When Miss Newlin came on deck she had a talk with him (Marquand), and thanked him for his interest; but she told him there were circumstances that made it seem best not to interfere just then with the flirtation (that was what he called it). He said Mary behaved with absolute propriety, and so did Mr. Chandler, for that matter. 'He behaved so well and got around the chaperon so tactfully that I saw he was in dead earnest,' he said; 'and it made me sick to have him *look* at such a girl as that. It was all I could do to keep from knocking him down on the spot.'

"Then, after Miss Newlin's death, which occurred suddenly only a day or so out from New York, it

was very natural that Mr. Chandler should take hold and should keep hold when you were not there to meet them."

Again John's face went down in his hands. Again a hoarse "Go on!" was his only comment.

"Of course, Mary expected you and did all she could to find out about you, but Mr. Chandler acted as her helper all along the line. He went to Chester with the body and was going to take Mary to the funeral, but I turned up before that and I butted right in and went along."

There was an inarticulate sound which George interpreted as thanks. He then related how he had haunted the hotel until that unfortunate tooth of his mother's had interfered with his police duty. He told how, knowing the train by which they must come back, some intuition had prompted him to go to the station with a cock-and-bull pretext, and there he had met the party, minus Mary and Mr. Chandler. "The cousin is rabidly jealous and the tone in which she told me they had 'missed the train' was pretty expressive. Of course, I don't know what did go on and I wouldn't be likely to question Mary. We know she is incapable of doing anything underhand, but I wouldn't promise so much for Mr. Chandler, with such a temptation in his way. He's not a half bad fellow, and if I had him away from women I should enjoy his company ever so much." A smothered sound, like a groan repressed, made George's face quiver. He cleared his throat. The rest was terribly difficult.

"John, you must make allowance for scandal-

mongers, and I believe that cousin is capable of making up stories and circulating them, but Mr. Marquand is honest even if he is an old busybody, and he has taken a real fancy to Mary and always liked you. He says"—George hesitated with compassionate eyes on the bent head—"that Chandler was seen by a friend of his driving up to the station at Paoli, with a beautiful girl, that evening around ten o'clock. I acted spy enough to know that they were back in the hotel before eleven.

"I know from Mary herself that she had a violent scene with her aunt and cousin next day. She just said that they insulted her in the most outrageous way, and she rushed off to Catharine's. I'm sorry she didn't go there first, but she was in a great deal of trouble (about you even more than Miss Newlin), and she wanted to be in touch with things, of course." George did not feel it necessary to give his whole opinion on that point, but something told him John understood.

"She got to Catharine's and found the house closed (she told me this herself), and the neighbor who keeps the key said Catharine had gone to a cousin of her husband's at Doylestown, who was about to be confined, and whose nurse was hurt somehow. The woman expected Catharine back at Fernwood by evening—it was six o'clock then. She told Mary she would go over and cook supper for her, only her child was very sick and she couldn't leave him a minute. She felt sure Catharine would be back before bedtime. Mary isn't timid, as you know, and she said she was all right. She didn't even mind staying there alone for

the night; but in the evening Mr. Chandler turned up. I suppose he just discovered where she was, and they waited for Catharine till the last train from up the road, and then she said Mr. Chandler wouldn't be persuaded to leave her, but sat on the piazza all the rest of the night after she went upstairs. He went away early in the morning, and Catharine arrived soon after."

For some minutes there was no sound in the room but the hurried breathing of the two men.

"John, I didn't need to vindicate Mary in your eyes. We know she could not lie in the least detail." John's face was suddenly raised with a white resolve in which there was absolute scorn of a doubt.

"But—" George hesitated, but the intent eyes on his forbade his hiding anything. "Mr. Marquand says that the whole story, with the worst possible construction on it, is in a dozen mouths, and someone has evidently spied on Mary's movements, and not only spied but circulated a malicious report. Of course, Mr. Chandler's character makes matters far worse, and it seems that the whole story of Mary's mother has been revived and added to it. I hate to tell you all this, old man, but of course you ought to know. I've been pretty blue lately on my own account, but if I could have spared you this, I would be willing to be unhappier than I ever have been. You know that." His eyes were full of tears as he held out his hand. John rose quickly, wrung it hard, seized the straw hat he had flung on the table on entering the room, and was gone.

It was a dull afternoon with a sultry wind that

brought occasional sprinkles of fine rain, too light to be called showers—the sort of day when you wish it would rain hard and have done with it. The little house looked melancholy and deserted, but, of course they would not be sitting on the wet piazza. Where was she? John's breathing was so hard and quick he had to stop to recover himself. He would take her by surprise; he would not step upon the path nor porch; he would go around on the grass to the kitchen. If no one were in sight, he would find a sheltered corner of the little porch and wait. As he stole around the house to the left, he did not try to hide himself from the windows, for he felt sure they would not be in the parlor at that time of day, and the one kitchen window on that side showed no sign of life as he came abreast of it, and emitted no sound, though it was wide open. A feeling of apprehension seized him. Were they lying down? It was so unlike tireless Mary to be lying down. Was she much changed—ill, perhaps, and Catharine in charge? He could not wait to know. He *must* call them. He no longer tried to walk softly, but the thick grass deadened the sound of his footsteps and unconsciously furthered his first purpose. As he turned the corner his heart gave a bound and stopped beating. Then it went on at such a headlong pace that it made a thundering in his ears and a mist before his eyes. She was so close to him and so unconscious! Seated in the little rocker, her face was buried on her arms on the table while a dress-waist on which she had evidently been sewing trailed one of its sleeves upon the floor as it hung half off her lap. Only once had

he ever seen this drooping, discouraged pose. The memory of that evening at Beach Haven when she had wished "he had not let her get so used to him" came vividly to his mind, bringing a thrill of hope and courage. Oh, to make her "used to him" again!

"Mary," he said softly. He expected her face to brighten with sudden joy. How often he had been welcomed by that radiant gladness! But he was quite unprepared for the emotion he read there now. She had sprang up and stood motionless, looking at him as though she could not trust her senses, her face white and quivering, her hands pressed to her bosom. John sprang up the steps at a bound and caught her in his arms, and with her face buried on his breast, she sobbed with a child's abandon. Neither could have spoken just then, but words were not needed.

Catharine, who came running downstairs, her dress only half on and a buttonhook in one hand, gave a loud, joyous exclamation as she reached the kitchen door, and then covered her face and sank upon the nearest chair, dropping the buttonhook with a clatter and utterly forgetting her partial dishabille.

"The Lord be praised!" she ejaculated at last. "Now she'll be all right, poor lamb." Then, with a sudden recollection of her open dress, she beat a hasty retreat to the upper regions, feeling, moreover, that her presence was not needed below stairs.

It was a long time before either John or Mary moved or uttered a word. She tried to draw away at last, but he would not let her go, and she laid her head against him again and asked with downcast

eyes and a broken voice: "Where did you come from, John? Did Mr. Raymond tell you—?"

"I got back from the west at one o'clock and saw George at once. I know a little of what has happened. I came here to know the rest."

"Oh, I have wanted you so!" she said, the tears starting afresh.

"Come in where we can sit down," John said, feeling her tremble and droop as though her strength failed her. He did not sit beside her when they reached the little parlor, but faced her with his back to the window, where he could watch the face he had not seen in so long a time, his own in shadow. He had not thought to find her so changed!

He told her then of his having missed the cablegram with the news of their homecoming, and of his careful arrangements about mail having miscarried through an accident to a guide. Of his forced journeys on foot and by canoe he did not speak—only mentioning his receipt of the bundle of letters at the same time as George's telegram. Mary's story was a longer one and her face made a very varied accompaniment to the recital. John hardly spoke, but his whole body listened, and she saw his hands clench more than once. She forbore to quote her aunt and cousin in full, but John understood enough. She saw him shiver when she told of Mr. Chandler's following her there to Fernwood.

"He has asked you to marry him, Mary?" he said in a hoarse voice, utterly unlike his own.

"Oh, yes!" The inflection was significant.

"And you—?"

"Oh, no, *no!*" The blood rushed to the roots of her soft hair.

"Because you do not care for him?" Still that strange low voice.

"I am sure I don't *love* him!" she said hurriedly, the crimson deepening, if that were possible. "But I do care a great deal about him.—I cannot explain it.—I am almost afraid of him. I mean—" interrupting herself hastily as she saw John's hands tremble. "I am almost afraid of *myself*. He would not *touch* me *again*"—she had not omitted Mr. Chandler's behavior at Valley Forge—"but—" John waited motionless except for that trembling that would not be controlled—"but I was not *altogether* angry when he kissed me." The confession was made with downcast eyes and quivering lips.

"Why do you think that you do not love him?"

She raised her eyes only one thrilling second, but something in them went through and through him. His half-formed purpose was suddenly a whole one. "Because I know," she said faintly, while the dark lashes swept her burning cheeks.

"Would you marry *me*, Mary?"

"You! Oh, *no!*" she said passionately, burying her face in her hands. John did not move a muscle.

"I don't want to marry *anyone!*" her face was still hidden. "I want to get away from it all and be quiet."

"Understand me, dear," John went on as quietly as though he were speaking of a suitable boarding place for her, "I do not ask you—" He stopped and drew a hard breath; "I only ask you to take my

name; to let me have the right to keep you with me. You shall be just as free as you are now, and just as much a child as you were at Beach Haven. You shall study law and help me with my work as you used to plan to do." His eyes were riveted upon her downcast face, which she had uncovered, and what he read there made this strangest of strange proposals grow more and more assured. "You used to be happy with me," he went on, but she interrupted him. "Happy! Oh! But I couldn't! You don't know what unkind things people are saying about me." Her voice sank very low.

"Who told you so?" he asked with ominous calmness.

"Aunt Annie wrote me that everybody was saying that I had been in Mr. Chandler's company out here. Oh, John! I cannot repeat all she said."

John rose suddenly and walked back and forth in the little room like a caged lion, to the imminent danger of the chairs and tables.

"Mary," he said, stopping abruptly in front of her. "I am going to see your aunt to-day and have a little talk with her. I shall tell her that you are to be married next week—I can get a license to-morrow—and that I shall soon find means to muzzle scandal-mongers. I *must* see her this once, and then I never want to set my eyes upon her again as long as I live."

"Oh, John!" Mary cried, utterly breathless and scared. He sat down again and leaned toward her, taking one hand and holding it tight.

"Don't be frightened; I shall behave with decent self-control," he said gently, wilfully misinterpreting

her. "I would wait to ask people, only everyone is away. Perhaps it will be better to wait till I can have announcements engraved and directed. I wish Mrs. Wharton were at home and we could be married from her house." (His coolness was having its effect, but he saw he had need of all his powers.) "If only Mrs. Logan would suggest our going there, but Ellen's being away——"

"Oh, I couldn't be married from there!" The suggestion evidently moved her deeply, but drew her mind for an instant away from the main cause of agitation. John understood. He waited for her to regain composure, making no effort to keep the hand she hastily withdrew; but composure was out of the question just yet.

"Oh, John, I can't do—what you ask. You don't know——"

Again he waited. "You are quite sure you have no least feeling for either Edward Logan or Philip?—that there is no younger man who—?" But his voice no longer showed suspense.

"No indeed," raising her eyes frankly to his, "nobody in the world, but——" (Self-control would not come.)

"Then we will have no more 'buts,'" he answered quickly, rising and moving away lest he should succumb to temptation.

"She loves me better than she knows, and it is the only way." Her eyes had spoken in a fashion that went far to silence qualms. Those years of close companionship, of full correspondence, had built a foundation after all—or so it seemed—too strong to

be shaken by a sudden attraction, however strong. He could wait longer. He was so used to waiting! But surely there were considerations now that forbade waiting, and made effectual protection for her imperative.

"Mary." He stopped his peregrinations at the other side of the room and looked toward her in a shamefaced way, while he drew something from an inner pocket, "I bought this ring once, because," he paused, "I hoped I might give it to you some time, if only as a pledge of our friendship, of our future partnership." He came slowly toward her, opening the little case. "You will let me put it on now?"

Mary looked down at the ring on its velvet background and tears rushed to her eyes. What ought she to do? She was so alone but for him, and he—— "Oh, it isn't right!" she cried brokenly, but she very slowly reached her left hand toward him, and he took it quickly and put it to his lips, as though he would seal the contract before she had time to repent. He slipped the little circlet on her finger and stood looking down on it with an emotion that made words impossible. The dull gray light from the window sufficed to draw out the brilliance of the twin stones, but Mary's eyes were too full to see, and her bosom was rising and falling stormily. The firm clasp in which her hand was held steadied her as it always had in the old days, and quenched the tumult of doubt and misgiving in a flood of warm, sweet remembrance.

"I have to go to Canada on business very soon," John said in a matter-of-fact voice that belied the underlying thrill. "I want you to go with me there,

but afterward—you are to be free to go or come just as you like and do whatever you want—only—always remember—you are making me very happy.” His voice got beyond control for a moment, but he steadied it quickly and let go her hand.

“Now we must tell Catharine,” he said briskly. “She is very tactful and patient.”

He took down his old friend, the Bernese, as he went by, and seemed to contemplate kissing her; but he set her up again without a word and left her to gaze on her surroundings as unmoved as though no quiet revolution had just taken place in her immediate neighborhood.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MR. CHANDLER READS THE NEWSPAPER

MR. CHANDLER stood in the dining-room of his sister's country house at Radnor. She was away from home, but he had the freedom of the premises, and since Mary was out of town, he was glad to avail himself of the quiet of this retreat. He had seen a curious look on the face of his fellow club-members the day before, and had found a marked copy of *Town Topics* in his morning mail, a perusal of which had made his blood boil. The fact that no names were mentioned served as a screen for the cowardly attack, but he would gladly have driven the editor from cover and made him swallow his words if the charge had been more than a scandalous insinuation. "And I could only do her more harm than good by defending her. Even my *word* is of no account in such a case!" "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches"—the old proverb that he had laboriously written and rewritten, line after line, in his childish copy-book and long ago forgotten, came flashing back before his eye in just the round cramped hand in which it had stood on the carefully lined page. Oh, to wipe out all that lay between then and now! Bitterness and pain made eating impossible.

"I'm not feeling up to the mark, Hughes," he said

to the solicitous butler. "I think I'll just go outside. I'm better off without eating."

"Won't you take the paper, sir? I'm very sorry you're not feeling yourself." Mr. Chandler was a favorite with his sister's retainers and Hughes had got him what he knew he liked best for breakfast, and cast a mournful look now at the exquisite melon with its burden of ice.

Mr. Chandler had a consciousness of being observed from the library window, and turned his back to the house, taking up the *Press* and ostensibly poring over its contents.

"I will see her once again and use all the eloquence I can command, but what can I say more than I have said?" He knew he was not base enough to urge her marrying him for conventional reasons. "Surely she need never know that her good name was being called in question."

He had looked a long time at that front sheet, and the back of his head seemed to feel the butler's eye upon it from afar. He turned the page with elaborate care and glanced idly at the headlines—"Patience Rewarded"—What did that matter to him? Suddenly the words of that short article were burned into his consciousness before he could even say that he had read them.

We are interested to hear of the approaching marriage of Philadelphia's rising lawyer, Mr. John Brown, who came prominently before the public eye last winter through his successful handling of the R—— case. Mr. Brown is about to crown his success in another department of life, and his many warm friends rejoice with him in the fulfilment of a long cherished hope. For

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it seems that there is a romantic story attached to the coming event.

He has been for several years the guardian of his future wife, who is only nineteen, and is the daughter of his oldest and best friend, the late Richard Farnham, of the Quaker branch of that well-known family. She has spent the years since her father's death under the educational wing of Miss Harriet E. Newlin, the distinguished principal of Beechfield School, who died recently on the return voyage from Europe with her ward and pupil. This sudden bereavement has served to hasten the nuptials for which Mr. Brown, we are told, has been patiently waiting.

Owing to the sad circumstances surrounding the pair—for Mr. Brown's mother, the widow of the late Joseph Brown, is also recently deceased—the wedding will be a very quiet one, only intimate friends of the contracting parties being present. The ceremony is to be performed on August 8th, at the Church of the Holy Trinity, by the Rev. Dr. McVickar, rector of the parish, who is coming back from ———, where he is passing his vacation time, to officiate at this important crisis in the life of one of his most valued parishioners.

If the eyes that Mr. Chandler suspected behind him were really there, they only saw the paper slowly lowered and a shapely brown hand reach for the Panama hat on the chair beside him and draw it low over his eyes.

"A good nap will do 'im more good than medicine, I dare say," the reassured butler remarked to himself two hours later. "'E 'asn't stirred since ten o'clock."

CHAPTER XXXIX

A QUEST FOR A COUNTRY HOME

JOHAN had never belonged to that wing of the Church which holds that the human soul would be unable to enter the highest heaven all at one burst, but must pass through—if not a real purgatory—at least an “intermediate place”—a sort of preparatory Paradise. He gave little time to speculation of that kind, trusting his future life to God as one trusts the itinerary of a voyage to a tried Friend, not without interest, but without concern.

As regards the present, he did feel in those first wonderful weeks of his “amazing marriage” that his heart would have been unable to bear a more complete happiness all at once after its long abstention. The future was his, he believed; he was amply content with the existing state of things. All the chivalry of his nature was enlisted, and he knew that he had barely saved Mary from a peril, and must use his advantage now with the greatest delicacy. That he had saved her heart-whole, or nearly so, he did not doubt, even after her frank confession; and if her eyes were often less ready to meet his than they used to be, there was no fault to be found with them when they did.

Perfect married love must hold, in just proportion, the elements of all other love. The true husband must

combine something of father and mother, brother, sister, friend and lover. But are there many true husbands, if that be the standard? I think there are; at least, there are many who conform to it in some particulars or in some degree. If "nine hundred and ninety-nine" fall short in kind or quantity, I hope by this time I have convinced my readers that in John Brown we are dealing with "the thousandth man"; otherwise I have been but a poor chronicler. Yet even Mary, who would have classed him rather as the "millionth," and would then have denied the possibility of ever finding eighty-nine others in the United States (and indeed, in those days there *were* fewer to select from!), began to doubt whether the paternal and fraternal elements in him were not developed at the expense of the passions, and to wonder whether it would have been possible to "someone else" to subsist so contentedly on a purely Platonic diet. She put the thought from her over and over again and declined to recognize the intruder as hers; but—have you ever tried to get rid of an importunate thought? Just when the first doubt came to trouble John's unselfish peace it would be hard to say. Not during those weeks in Canadian town and country, where they walked together, rowed together, visited the sights of the great cities, explored the wonders of the great rivers, and made friends with Indians and French. They *suit*ed each other completely, as they always had. John recognized that Mary was much changed, and he would have been surprised not to find her sobered by her recent experiences. He knew she must mourn Miss Newlin, who had been so

true and loving a friend, companion and guide. It was but natural that her eyes should sometimes fill and that her face should have that pensive, far-off look when her voyage home was recalled. It was natural that the news of Mr. Chandler's leaving "for big game hunting in India" should move her strongly. There must be something good in the man, when even George could not speak of him without feeling—something apart from his physical and mental attractions. John trusted Mary implicitly, but he could not help a secret satisfaction that India was a long way off.

The city seemed stuffy and dirty after their free life in the open, and the house dark and confining. They were glad to get out to the last of the cricket matches, which occurred the day after they got home; but for the first time Mary was conscious not only of many eyes upon her, but of more curiosity than friendliness in some. Estelle Gill had done her work thoroughly before she left the city. Instinctively Mary drew a little nearer to her big protector, and the wonder came over her what her position would have been now without him. To be sure, she had some very loyal friends. Had not every member of the Logan family come from far and near to her wedding, from Mr. Logan himself, who rarely moved from home, down to ecstatic Priscilla, who felt that those birthday rings had been the "real thing," and that she might confidently look forward to the day when she too should stand at the altar in a white dress with a trail and a beautiful, filmy veil on her head. But she decided that she would be married at a time of year when satin or heavy silk would not be too warm.

"Of course, Mary would look beautiful in anything," but batiste, however daintily made and trimmed, was too simple for the taste of the youngest Miss Logan.

Mary's mind was full of the memory as she watched the game with absent eyes. She recalled what she had felt when Edward came up to her and grasped her hand after that solemn ceremony. "Mary," he had said, with a brave smile, "he deserves even you, and there is no one else who ever could."

Did John notice the sensation they were making, Mary wondered now? If he did, it seemed to trouble him not at all. He noticed her involuntary movement and looked down at her for a moment in a way to make her heart beat faster, and convince all whom it might concern that he was not ashamed of his bargain.

The trees had only just begun to show signs of autumn, though October was already come. The air was as mild as summer. As they waited for their train, on the crowded platform, John suddenly looked down at her with a very crooked smile. "Mary, how would you like to live in the country?" he asked.

"Oh!" was all the answer he got, but her face spoke for her.

"It would have to be for all the year, I think, unless we come in to a hotel for a few months to give you some dissipation. Wouldn't that frighten you?"

"The hotel might, but never the country," she declared enthusiastically; and then they were interrupted by an acquaintance. Next day John suggested their going on quests of houses or building sites while the fine autumn weather lasted, and it was the first

of several excursions to the north and west of the city, George sometimes being asked to join them.

"It is lucky for my business that this is a rainy day," John said at lunch a couple of weeks later. "I've got to shirking so I shall soon be snowed under." He sighed at the thought of the autumn woods and of Mary in the house alone.

"I had a note from Ellen this morning, asking if she might bring Miss Hutchinson to call on me some afternoon—of course, she knew she might—and when it would suit me. So I sent John Patterson around there at once to suggest their coming this afternoon, because I knew we couldn't go land-hunting in this weather. Ellen sent back word that she was free and she was almost sure Miss Hutchinson was, so I suppose they will come. I do wish you were going to be at home, for I should like you to see her too; but it is too good a chance for you to get on with your work. When am I going to begin to help you?" She colored brightly as she smiled up at him.

It must be confessed that John's dyke needed extra vigilance these days, and the hope was growing fast that he might soon lay it flat once for all. His head reeled at the thought when it came, and he dared not look at her smiling lips; still less at her sad ones. She was a tremendous tax on his self-control when he found her dreaming over the fire that afternoon as he came in from the raw darkness of the street.

"Oh, John!" It was the old, impulsive exclamation that he loved, and her face was very bright as she sprang up to meet him; but he saw that there had been tears in her eyes the moment before—the glim-

mer of them was still there. It was perfectly natural that he should find that glimmer there oftener since they got home. There were so many things to remind her of Miss Newlin!

“Miss Hutchinson is charming, and what do you think she said! When she heard about our country plans and what a hard time we had had finding a place that suited us and wasn’t too expensive, she asked if we would care for her part of the country, and said she would gladly sell us some of her own property—fifteen or even twenty acres, if we wanted so much—for five hundred dollars an acre. Just imagine! That is such an expensive section! But money is nothing to her, I suppose, and she says her place is so big she feels lonely, only she has been afraid of neighbors not being congenial.”

“How does she know that she would find us congenial? You must have made a rapid and complete conquest.” He spoke lightly, but a flush rose to his forehead, and there was sudden fire in his eyes.

“She has heard a great deal about you,” Mary went on rather hurriedly and looking away from him. “She seemed really eager to have you decide to take the land. It is the site of a farm-house that was burned down long ago, and there are lovely trees and woods and a creek. Couldn’t we go and see it to-morrow? I am sure from the way Ellen made eyes at me behind Miss Hutchinson’s back that she meant that it was Mr. Raymond who had talked so much about you. Do you suppose——?”

“Well, what, for instance?”

“You know.” She was not looking at him; was it

only the firelight that made her cheeks so bright? He took a quick step forward, but something arrested him.

"Ellen said the other day that 'Cousin Mary' thought 'Caroline' missed Mr. Raymond more than she knew herself. Perhaps part of her reason for wanting us for neighbors is that—of course, she must know he would build our house for us, and——"

Why did John's good angel desert him? That sudden strong impulse to take her in his arms gave place to a timidity that made his manner unnatural and constrained.

The visit was paid next day, and Miss Hutchinson's cordial simplicity and sincerity won John almost as easily as the beautiful land in its brilliant October setting. The bargain was quickly made and the papers were in course of preparation when the news was broken to George. Mary's gossip had roused John's curiosity and sympathy, but he was unprepared for George's emotion.

"John," he said in a very unsteady voice after a long, embarrassed pause, "I am going to ask you to get somebody else to build that house for you."

John went over to him and put one hand on his shoulder. "I can't let you off so easily," he said lightly; then seeing the sensitive, pained flush on George's face, he pressed the shoulder firmly, and said with teasing emphasis on each word, "George, nobody has confided in me, but I feel sure that our landlady knew the name of our prospective architect when she offered us the land."

CHAPTER XL

"NO BIGGER THAN A MAN'S HAND"

THE plans for the new house went happily forward, but the business partnership met with a check in the very beginning. Mary found herself an object of such interest that she knew she interfered with John's work and stopped the mouths of clients. He had bought an office desk for her and fitted it completely, and her pleasure in it and interest in the cases which were carefully explained to her were reflected in his face.

Her quick, indignant sympathy with the wronged, and impatience of the slowness of the law, her intelligent grasp of rights and wrongs, and ardent longing to help straighten things out, were altogether in keeping with the Mary of three years ago and quite different from the pensive, half-shy reserve John often encountered at home. Several times there he had seen tears in her eyes when she thought herself unobserved, and more than once she had opened her lips as though to tell him something and had evidently checked the impulse. One morning two clients eyed her with such impertinent amusement that she promptly retired, as indeed she generally did, foreseeing confidences not intended for her ears. As they passed out, they did not see her in the cloak closet where she

had gone in search of something, and she heard one say with good-humored sarcasm, "If you want to find an uxorious fool, look for a middle-aged man with a pretty young wife. She's a beauty, all right; but imagine him bringing her down here to his office to show off." Both passed on laughing and Mary stood rooted to the floor, one hand in the pocket she was rifling; her face an indignant flame.

What did "uxorious" mean, anyhow? Her Latin came to her aid, but she quietly verified her surmises by a glance at the dictionary when she went back to the office.

"John," she said a moment later, "I'm not coming down here any more—at least not when you are receiving people. I will help you all I can at home." John saw she had made up her mind and saw also that she was averse to giving her reasons. He had been conscious more than once of the sensation she was causing, and felt that their simple, natural plan of co-operation was not going to work well. He sighed, but made no attempt to dissuade her, and she did not come again. How much he missed that frank work together no one knew, and he had a sense of some barrier growing between them, none the less real because it was intangible. Had he shown his feeling for her too plainly, and was it fear of his overstepping the boundaries tacitly agreed upon between them that made her often shy of him? He held himself more carefully in check, remembering how completely she had put herself in his power.

Mary had opposed his wish to have a reception for her and formally introduce her to his mother's circle.

He told her of Mrs. Brown's plan, and saw that she was touched and gratified, but she would not hear of any large entertainment in the house so soon after its mistress' leaving it, and he acquiesced for the time being. Perhaps he might wait and make it a house-warming for the new home. It was one day soon after the dissolution of the business partnership that they met Mrs. Townsend, Mr. Chandler's sister, at the house of an old friend, where they were making an afternoon call. Mary talked to her with perfect dignity and self-possession, and John saw with what a melancholy interest Mrs. Townsend's eyes dwelt on the beautiful, earnest face when she thought her observation unnoticed.

It was dark when they started to walk home in the early evening, but as they passed a street lamp he saw that Mary was struggling for composure and that her eyes were full of tears. A dull, cold something passed through his heart, but with it a resolve to face the enemy in the open if there were one, and know his strength and quality.

"What is it, Mary?" He put his hand on her shoulder. "I think I could understand if you will tell me." The touch and words unnerved her and for a moment he thought she would utterly break down. She drew one hand from her muff and slipped it through his arm, while she pressed close to him.

"It's nothing, really," she said brokenly. "I don't know what made me cry—" trying hard to stop the fast falling tears. "I must be nervous, I think."

John said no more. He knew she was not consciously prevaricating, but the pain in his throat was

harder. For days and even weeks after he saw an appeal in her eyes. He felt there was always that checked impulse to tell him something. He dared not try to help her. Each time the impression was but momentary, and then she would be like herself, and some unconquerable cowardice—a sensitive fear, as of the rough probing of a wound, held him back.

A large check had come to him from the little ladies whose fortunes he had made by helping them hold what had proved valuable coal lands; and with it a note asking him to buy something he most wanted, and not to put the money at interest. John had acted promptly and lavishly, and the week before Christmas slipped into the office safe a long, blue velvet case that enclosed a string of lustrous pearls. "It is an outrageous price to pay for an ornament," he said to himself as he closed the heavy door and rose with a shamefaced smile; "but she need not know that."

He pictured her pleasure as he walked home in the frosty dusk. Would she perhaps offer to kiss him? He colored hotly at the thought. Surely he was not mean enough to want to *buy* her kisses! That sense of foreboding was always on him, chilling the warmth in his heart. She was to go to a little parish meeting that afternoon to prepare for the Sunday-school Christmas. She had taken an interest in the parish work already, while frankly confessing to the rector her scruples about joining the church. "If she had not come back before this he would go for her," he thought as he put his latch-key in the door. No sign of her. John Patterson was just lighting the gas in the hall.

"Mrs. Brown came in a while ago, but she said she was going round to the news-stand for a paper. She wouldn't let me go for her. She'll be back in a minute, I guess."

John hesitated and then lingeringly took off his coat and hung it on the rack. John Patterson looked at his master's thoughtful face as he turned and slowly mounted the stairs. At the top, John paused and listened. What was that? A sound like a smothered sob. It came from the little glass-partitioned hall-room which had been his mother's favorite sitting-room, but which was rarely used now. John's door to it was never opened. The glass door was closed and the curtains drawn, but as their top was barely six feet from the floor, they made no barrier to his sight. He did not try to soften his footfalls nor to peep over. He meant to knock, but even as his hand was put out for that purpose he stopped dumb-struck by the sight that met his eyes across the silken screen.

Mary had not heard his step. She was on the floor, her hat and jacket still on, her arms on his mother's old chair and her face buried in them. In the dim light he saw the lithe body shaken with the sobs she strove to control. A newspaper lay where she had dropped it. His hand was on the knob—his impulse to kneel beside her and take her in his arms; to beg for her whole confidence, however it might hurt. It could not hurt him more to know *all* the truth he had tried hard not to suspect. But something stayed him. Why should he force her confidence? He felt he had not strength just then to bear the truth. He drew

back and went noiselessly down the stairs. If her trouble were something she cared to explain she would come to him. Perhaps in a few minutes she would bring the paper down and tell him all? As he sat waiting, he overcame the shrinking that had unmanned him, and his heart was wrung more at the memory of that lonely, childish figure than at the sense of his own loneliness.

More than an hour passed before he heard her step in the hall above and then on the stairs. He rose and came toward her. She was paler than usual, but quite composed, as she smiled and held out her hand. There was no paper in it. But the hand was cold and the eyes held a dumb appeal that cut him to the quick.

She commenced at once to speak of the Christmas preparations and was too full of her own self-consciousness to notice John's constraint.

"Why, you aren't eating your dinner at all, John," she said when they had been seated for some time opposite each other, under the old-fashioned chandelier that was an unbecoming light at best. "I thought you were fond of chicken pie. Aren't you feeling well, you look so pale?"

John smiled a disclaimer and fell to eating at once. "You are in a conspiracy with Bridget to make me fat," he said easily.

"We haven't succeeded very well." Mary looked at him with eyes so full of unfeigned, wistful love that the lump in his throat threatened to make further inroad on the pie impossible.

He was down before her in the morning, and as his

eye fell on the paper he saw at once an article that had not been in his *Bulletin* of the evening before. It was a message from a Bengal correspondent, copied from the London *Times*.

Mr. David Chandler, an American sportsman, who arrived here last month for the hunting, has barely escaped with his life from the onslaught of a furious tiger. He was hunting in company with Lord B — and Mr. Miles Brandon and the calamity is said to have been due to his own reckless disregard of the proper precautions. The presence of mind and unerring marksmanship of Mr. Brandon alone saved Mr. Chandler from being torn to pieces. As it was, he was so badly mauled that he is now in a critical condition in Lord B——'s bungalow near here.

John read no further. John Patterson had left the room; his heavy tread could be heard on the cellar stairs. What was best to do? Speak to Mary frankly and kindly of what he had seen? Say nothing and pretend not to have looked at the paper? The recollection of yesterday, of her grief, was too vivid. He knew he could not subject either her or himself to such a trial—at least, before a third party. "Critical condition"—the words repeated themselves in his brain. "God forgive me!" he prayed mutely. He took two steps to the fire and hastily laid the crumpled paper on the burning logs.

CHAPTER XLI

"A LITTLE SOMETHING—TO EARN HEAVEN"

JOHN sat in his office the afternoon before Christmas, his head bowed on his hands, in deep thought. Suddenly he lifted his heavy eyes to a framed group of a cricketing eleven on the wall above his desk, in the forefront of which Dick Farnham's boyish figure sat cross-legged with his bat over his knees.

"I thought it was the right thing when I did it," John said, silently addressing the picture. "And now I can only do my best. It is better for her to be a little unhappy with me, than——"

He drew out his watch and opened the case. The childish face with the pure brow and clear eyes looked straight at him. He gazed down at it till a tear startled him by splashing on the painted card. He dried it with apprehensive care, and his eyes afterward.

"Anything is better than that she should belong to a man of that kind." But if she loved him? Could not love, like charity, "cover a multitude of sins." In that moment the realization came to him that if Mary had been guilty of all that slander had imputed to her, and had told *him* (John) that she loved him best, he would have felt himself happy in taking her.

"I had no rival in her love then," he thought,

recalling her face when she had put the little picture into his hand on Christmas morning three years ago. But it had been a child's love. She loved him no less now, only—— He closed the watch case and covered his face. The soft brilliancy of her look which it was always hard for him to meet, came before his closed eyes. She had never meant to mislead him; never thought of trying to convey more than she felt. There was some physical property in the humors or lenses of the eyes that would magnify feeling without her will. Surely they were the honestest eyes in the world! John Patterson called to the witness-stand would have borne no uncertain testimony to the message of those eyes, and would stoutly have combated the magnifying-glass theory; but he did feel that married people in his master's walk of life had different ways from "poor folks," and his most ardent wish—unconfessed even to the partner of his bosom—was that he might just once "see them kiss each other good."

There was a brisk tap at the door. John had not noticed steps, and his clerks were gone. He had given them a holiday to-day. He unlocked the door and stood face to face with George, whose beaming countenance suddenly shadowed as his eyes met John's.

"I went to the house to find you," he said, "and Mary told me you had come down here again after lunch. I told her my news"—the brightness would break through the momentary cloud! "Oh, John! I think I owe it all to you."

"You don't tell me you have *that* news for us," John said in a bantering voice, but grasping George's

shoulder with a hand that trembled in spite of him. "I *am* surprised," he smiled brightly; then he said gravely: "George, I needn't tell you how happy this has made me. She is a noble woman who hasn't been a bit spoiled by prosperity, and it hasn't needed superhuman perception to know something of what she thinks of you."

"I can't possibly take it in," George said, winking away some womanish moisture, and troubled amid all his happiness with concern for his friend. John's face was old and lined.

"Mary says you are to dress a tree this evening," he said smiling, but looking keenly at John's eyes.

"Yes, we're both children on the subject of Christmas trees, and I sent up a lot of gimcracks yesterday to put on it."

Christmas brings warmth and cheer to the saddest heart if haply no bitterness lurks at its core; and the dressing of that tree, the tying of parcels and filling of baskets that were to carry Christmas into many humble homes, the practical consultations, the hundred nameless intimacies of mutual labor, and above all the knowledge of their oneness in love for the great Cause of Christmas—in desire for service under His banner—all these influences made John's cheerfulness not wholly forced, and for those few hours hope struggled to life. It was gone again next morning when he put the velvet case beside her plate ready for the Christmas breakfast; and her face when she opened it baffled him. Was there any joy in the conflict of emotions he read there? He could not see it, but something in her brimming eyes and pale cheeks

as she laid the gift down and came toward him, brought vividly to his mind the memory of that tear-wet face that had pressed his on the day of their first parting. The pain of the recollection unmanned him, and the lips that touched her forehead for an instant were cold. She knew that something was wrong, but she had not courage to question.

In the days and weeks that followed he evidently avoided her, and it seemed as though chance intervened to keep them always apart; to fill the time they might have been together with a host of trivial engagements and interruptions.

Mary could not tell what was going on in his mind, and his manner to her was tenderness itself; but it seemed as though some trouble in which he would not allow her to share was making him thin and worn, and each timid effort on her part to approach him was met with a gentle, but decided withdrawal.

In those three long, long years of his guardianship, John had tried to follow his mother's advice and school himself for every possible discipline later on. Many times he had pictured himself beside Mary happily married to someone else, but always dependent (as he felt she always would be) on himself; but the thought of her *tied to him*—for "as long as they both should live"—and *unhappy*; trying to conquer love for someone else—mutely craving forgiveness in numberless little wistful, affectionate ways—oh, he had never faced that, never schooled himself for that!

The patient courage which had kept him sane and helped him to understand her, gave place to fits of utter depression and passionate longing that drove

him to any subterfuge rather than be left alone to face her eyes.

One raw, dull evening in early February he stood in evening clothes, waiting in the hall for her. They were to dine with Miss Hutchinson and go afterward to see the Kendalls in "Still Waters Run Deep." It was to be an informal party, Elsie Raymond being asked, and Ellen Logan with Philip Dillwyn, who was in pretty constant attendance on his cousin of late; and there were a couple of extra swains to balance "Cousin Mary" and Elsie.

John raised his eyes as the graceful figure in a dress of soft violet blue silk, with square-cut neck, turned the stair landing. Her beauty hurt him. She saw the involuntary contraction of his face as he turned his eyes away.

"John, I *know* you are not well. I wish you would let us stay at home. I would *so* much rather!" She seemed struggling with some inner agitation.

"Why, I am perfectly well, dear, and it would never do to disappoint Miss Hutchinson at this eleventh hour." He took the cloak from her arm and prepared to hold it for her. "You wanted to see this play, too, and so do I."

He knew there were tears in her eyes, although he would not look in her face. "Not yet," she said, warding off the wrap. "If I *must* go, I want my pearls." There was no brightness of face or voice.

He opened the safe under the stairs and took out the velvet case.

"Won't you clasp them on for me, please?" Why did she want to test him thus? John thought. His

jaw was squared as he put the necklace around the white throat. He tried not to touch her, and his hands were trembling so much that the little brilliant-studded clasps would not join.

"I think my eyes are getting old," he said with a forced laugh, "and the light is very poor. I believe you can do it better by the feel."

She said nothing, but lifted her arms without looking around, and took the clasps from his unsteady fingers.

John was the gayest of the little party assembled round the board in Miss Hutchinson's grand dining-room, but Mary saw that he ate practically nothing, and her own spirits were at the ebb.

"Mr. Brown, I hope you don't mind sitting on the front row, but these seats are so cramped I know you would be in misery on this one, and I will keep you company." Miss Hutchinson steered her guests into row B, while she moved around in front.

"That was a very kind thought, even without the bonus," John said laughing and following her. "Only I'm afraid of George's black looks on my back; my coat is thin."

"Black looks never penetrate," she answered, but she colored very prettily as her eye met a look which certainly was not black. They were hardly settled before the curtain went up and the play began.

John knew not and cared not what they were talking about. His main feeling was dead weariness and a sense of thankfulness that for the time being the acting was to be only on the stage. Did Miss Hutchinson guess that something was amiss? At

least she did not appeal to him when there was a joke or *bon mot*, and there were many. Two or three times she looked back with an appreciative twinkle, but she quite ignored John. Even between the acts she discussed the play volubly with Philip Dillwyn, who was Mary's partner, and John was relieved.

It was near the end of the third act that there came a sudden loud explosion followed by a cry of fire and a spring of the audience to its feet, and the next moment the house was in utter darkness. John rose too, but like one suddenly awakened to a strange world and uncertain what was happening. There was a mad rush for the exits accompanied by stentorian shouts of "Keep your seats," which no one heeded. The new electric-light plant was spoken of, but there was little time or inclination for surmises.

John heard his own name in Mary's voice and felt her hand on his arm. He was wide-awake now and thinking fast. He turned and put his hands under her elbows and lifted her lightly over the seats to where he stood. "Through the boxes!" he called to the others, and without an instant's delay, as thick smoke was coming from below the stage, he reached back and groped for Mary's wrap, drew her to the parapet of the foremost box and lifted her over. As he vaulted to her side he realized that none of the others would be able to accomplish his feat.

"The second box is lower," he called with all the power of his lungs, and then he felt for the velvet hangings, and pushed Mary in front of him through into the inky black of the passage behind.

"Don't be frightened, dearest, there is an exit

very near." Apparently the occupants of the boxes were all finding it, for they were quite alone. He felt her nestle close to him, and involuntarily his arms closed round her as he paused a moment from his labors.

"I don't care about anything in the world if only I am with you!" It was the tone more than the words that pierced the veil of misunderstanding and struck his heart. He bent over her with an inarticulate murmur. In the palpitating darkness their lips met, and time and place were not. The shouts and groans, the sounds of striving and panic fell on deaf ears. In that long, long kiss, the years of patience and pain were blotted out, and John was drinking life's elixir at its source. It was not long "as men count time." A strong, cold draught told them the exit was near, and he released her just enough to wrap her in the warm folds of the cloak before he lifted her high in his arms and moved steadily forward. Even then he pressed but gently through the struggling, panting crowd, taking care how he used his advantage of height and strength. Not a word was spoken between them till they gained the little open passage outside, and he was pushing on to the street.

Then Mary said suddenly, "Oh, it's snowing and you have no hat nor coat." She was answered only by a closer clasp and a happy little laugh. We have all of us been told over and over again that contentment is a state of mind and has little to do with outward circumstances. However it be in general, it is an undeniable fact that the cold February wind

and the wet February snow beating upon John's uncovered head and thinly-clad shoulders, had no more power than the slush of the pavement, penetrating his evening shoes, to cool that warmth at his heart's core.

He did not understand it. Explanations might be possible or impossible. It might be some sudden miracle, or a gradual unconscious growth. All need of question or answer was far from him as yet. He knew the one thing that made all others indifferent. His pain of an hour ago had been as real as his rapture now, but he did not ask for proofs. His heart was too full for one word.

Barney McGonigle, his favorite Jehu, was ahead of time at the appointed spot as he always was, his motto being "first come, first served," and was already alive to the fact that "something was up."

"Is your horse rough?" John asked as the man clambered down and held open the door.

"I'm just afther gettin' fresh carkin's on 'im, surrh."

"Good! then drive Mrs. Brown home as quickly as you can and come right back here for me." He placed his burden inside as he spoke and drew back. But Mary was too quick. Her hands were clasped around his arm and they were strong. "What are you going to do?" she gasped.

"I must go back and help the others. It will be only a little while. I feel—" he spoke in her ear, his cheek to hers—"I feel strong enough to lift a mountain."

She knew him too well to attempt to dissuade

him. She yielded and leaned back in the cab while the willing Barney made the best of his "carkin's."

An hour later, John Patterson, drawn to the open pantry door by the sound of his master's key (a lemon in one hand and a decanter in the other), had that ardent wish of his fulfilled. But the purring of the kettle and Hannah at the same time prevented his hearing those low words which were for Mary's ear alone; "My precious wife! I had to try to do a little *something* to earn—heaven!"

CHAPTER XLII

THE MORNING AFTER

I SEE they had a scrimmage in the —— Street Theater last night that might have cost a good many lives. Fortunately it seems to have ended with nothing worse than a lot of people gettin' their corns tramped on, and some women fainting and havin' hysterics. They always keep 'em on tap!" Dr. Ross folded his newspaper and laid it on the table beside him, while he took the cup of coffee his daughter reached across to him.

"A 'scrimmage'?" She spoke with a mixture of displeasure and curiosity. Her father's language was a thorn in the refined flesh of Miss Gladys Ross, but curiosity was stronger than disdain, to judge by the expression on her plain face. Her father was a great favorite among his patients, she knew, and had manners both courtly and elegant when he chose; but "the older he got, the more license he allowed himself, and the greater pleasure he seemed to take in rubbing her the wrong way."

"Well, I haven't time to go into all the details; I leave that for you. Some chemical or other exploded under the stage and made a noise and smoke and a bad smell, and right on top of it the lights went out. The paper seems to think it was a put-up job of a

gang of pickpockets who knew about the lighting, and that they probably made a big haul. I'd like the chance to wring their necks, every mother's son of 'em: What's that?" The last sharp remark was addressed to the maid who handed him a note. "Where did it come from?"

"Mrs. Brown's man brought it round a little while ago. I was just goin' to give it to you when Mrs. Ross rang for her breakfast." (Mrs. Ross was a confirmed invalid who never came down to the 7.30 family breakfast.)

"Mrs. Brown's man? John Patterson?" The doctor took the small, square envelope, addressed in a clear, characteristic hand (Mary's writing had improved much since the old days), and tore it hastily open. He read the contents aloud:

John hurt his hand bursting open a door at the theater last night. He says it is nothing, but I know it ought to be cared for at once. Could you come around before your office hours?

Hastily yours,

MARY FARNEAM BROWN.

Dr. Ross glanced at the clock and commenced to ply his knife and fork energetically, his eye still on the little note.

"First time in twenty years I've been called in for John Brown himself, often as we've confabbed over other people." There was an entire transformation in the doctor's voice and manner. "What fool thing has he been doing, I wonder. Trying to help, of course. I wouldn't have been surprised to hear of his being in bed, though," he added, with a somber brow;

"for I met him lately and he looked down and out. I couldn't get his face out of my mind. I'm afraid ——" the doctor checked himself and hastily drowned his fears in the remains of his coffee. He did not feel like communicating them to his daughter, but she forestalled him.

"I think he's one of the cases that 'married in haste' and is 'repenting at leisure.'"

Dr. Ross winced perceptibly as he set down his empty cup, but he only gave a contemptuous "Pooh!" He did not rise at once, however, as he had meant to, and the glance he gave his daughter showed a certain interest in her grounds of diagnosis. If there was one man whose welfare the doctor took to heart more than another's, that man was his old patient's son.

"Well, I've always said it was a big risk for a settled, quiet man like Mr. Brown to marry any girl in her teens," Miss Gladys went on, sagely; "but I've heard things about her lately, and she's not the kind of woman to make any decent man happy." In spite of her father's snort, she saw she had thoroughly roused his curiosity. She also thought she saw that the idea was not a new one to him. "I've not been listening to gossip. I know what I'm talking about, and I got it straight. Mr. Brown married her purely and simply to save her reputation. He promised her father to do all he could for her, and that was his idea of keeping his word."

"Nonsense! He has always been possessed about the girl! His mother told me herself that she had been opposed to the idea of his marrying her on account of the discrepancy in years. It came pretty hard on

Mrs. Brown to think of his marrying anybody"—he smiled a wry little smile—"but when she found she was going to die, she was keen for it, and told me John would never look at any other woman, and that she knew his ward, if she would have him, could make his life very happy. It was only a day or two before the stroke that we were talking of it, and I spoke about it to Raymond after her death, when I heard John was going abroad. He said, in his opinion, the girl was cut out for John. I've never seen her near to, but she's good-lookin' in the distance. She wasn't home when I called, you know."

"Oh, yes, she's *pretty* enough. That's what turns men's heads. Even as clear-headed a man as Mr. Brown isn't proof against a beauty. But he knew the facts when he married her in such a hurry, and the people who admire him most say he would have married her just the same if she'd been as ugly as——" The time-honored simile for ugliness being distasteful to her, Miss Ross could only play an unconscious charade. "You never would listen to the gossip about her and Mr. Chandler; but I heard the other day—and it came to me perfectly straight—that she had run off from her aunt, or her chaperon, and met Mr. Chandler at a deserted house somewhere in the country, and wasn't found for days. That was when Mr. Brown was out West, but he knew it as soon as he got home, and ——." She got no further.

"*Damn* the women! Don't let me hear another word of their scandalous blather!" The doctor rose suddenly, with fiery eyes glaring through gold-rimmed spectacles like strange gems in a thin gold setting,

and brought his fist down on the table with a force that made the cups jump up in the saucers.

Apparently he would not have heard another word if he had stayed to listen, for his daughter's lips closed like a vise and her whole figure was one disdainful protest against his profanity, mixed with a consciousness of her own unassailable authority. She did not even turn her head as he went out.

"If I'm not back in time the people can wait," the doctor said testily to the colored lad whose duty it was to mind the door, as he went out into the snowy street, not waiting for his carriage, and struggling into his ulster. His daughter was quick to discover his forgotten overshoes, but he was already out of the range of her remonstrances.

"Come right in here, Dr. Ross," John said, moving toward the door of the den, while he answered a volley of abrupt questions, apropos of his accident, after helping the old gentleman divest himself of his snowy outer garments. "Tryin' to pull down the temple of Gaza, as usual!" the doctor grunted, as he glanced at John keenly over his shoulder. He spread his hands above the blaze of the newly-lighted fire. In spite of his violence toward his daughter's theory and news, he had been secretly much perturbed. They both tallied with his own private fears and privately acquired information. John's face had seemed to him the face of a man bearing a heavy load and beginning to lose his grip and falter under it. What he saw there now made him return his attention to the warming of his hands with a sense of mystification.

"Now let me have a look at it. Hm!"—drawing

John to the window and removing an amateur bandage from the red, swollen hand.

"It's nothing! No tendons are broken, I'm sure; but I suppose I strained them. The exit was frozen and I jerked pretty hard. Mary tied it up with some arnica we found, but it was probably very old. We neither of us keep much of a drug store. We're so outrageously healthy that I don't know whether you ever met my wife. You were away last summer, I remember." Dr. Ross had heard the step on the stairs, and now turned expectantly toward the door as John introduced them to each other. The words of conventional greeting were checked on his lips, and he felt the blood mount to his face. He had been told she was a beauty, but he had not expected this sort of beauty—beauty of the soul, of the intellect. The features were quite lost sight of in that marvelous loveliness of expression. It made one's heart behave strangely even at seventy. "Anyone who looked like that ought not to be judged by the rules that govern ordinary women." He did not realize that he was staring at her and holding her hand an unconscionable time till he heard John's laugh—a laugh of pure bubbling amusement that surely came from some well of deep content.

"I beg your pardon," he said, smiling genially at his own expense; "but you must be used to it."

Mary colored warmly, but joined frankly in John's laugh, as she withdrew to the other side of the window. She pressed forward as the doctor went on with his interrupted examination of the wounded hand. "I shall hurt you some," he said, when John involun-

tarily winced and frowned at the probing, expert though it was.

"Don't you worry yourself about John Brown's 'repentance at leisure.'" Dr. Ross said to his daughter at luncheon. "If he's made any mistake, he would be mighty sorry to have it corrected. I saw his wife this morning and I don't blame his forgiving anything, if there was anything to forgive—which I don't believe. I hurt him like the mischief to-day mauling his hand to find out what the trouble was; but she slipped hers into the other one, and, Lord! he never felt *me*. They thought my old eyes didn't see what was going on, but I'm not such a bat as all that."

* * * * *

No doubt the doctor's old eyes would have enjoyed the picture in the den after his departure.

"No, please, John," Mary had said, "I want to sit on this stool just as I did that first day, only I'll have to come on this side," pushing him back into his chair while she drew the old well-remembered stool to his side and possessed herself of his left hand. She looked sorrowfully at the bandaged right one, slung across his chest. She had him rather in her power thus, but however supine that left hand lay in hers, with her cheek against its palm as on that other eventful day, she knew her withes were too slender to hold him if he chose to break them.

"I understand so well what your mother must have felt that day, John. Suppose I had had you all to myself for years and years and I saw somebody stealing you away from me! She was growing fond of me

before I went away, I am sure, and I meant to do my best to make her love me. I think I loved you even then; I mean I think I was *in love* with you, though I didn't know it. It seems to me I *always* was, from the minute I saw you first in Father's room. I never remember 'getting religion' and I never remember any sudden change in my love for you. I just loved you always, as much as I possibly could." His hand lifted the face resting upon it till it came within easy reach of his lips. For the time being conversation ceased.

"Dearest," he said, in a low voice, a few moments later, "there is something I meant not to allude to, but what you said just now makes me change my mind. Before you went to Europe I *hoped* you were growing to love me in the way I wanted. When I came to you at Catharine's that day I would not have asked you to marry me if I had not thought I read in your face more than you knew yourself; if I had not convinced myself then that your feeling for—Mr. Chandler"—he choked a little as he uttered the name—"was a passing one, but—since then—I was afraid—I had made a mistake. I didn't blame you"—he spoke hurriedly as she dropped his hand and opened her lips to answer, crimsoning to the roots of the bright, dishevelled hair. The arm came quickly round her.

"Oh, John, that night we met Mrs. Townsend, I was telling you the truth when I said I didn't know why I cried, and even then I was afraid you might think—and I hadn't the courage to explain even if I had known how. Once, before you came back from Columbia, I was afraid I might be—going to love Mr.

Chandler—in spite of myself, but when I saw you again I knew that whatever I felt for him, I only wanted to be with you always. I would have been your secretary; your servant—*anything*—so you would keep me with you—but I dreaded love-making just then. I was too stirred up; and I was so thankful to you for understanding. I was so happy in Canada in spite of being sorry about Miss Newlin and having the heartache sometimes over Mr. Chandler's pain—he felt more than you think, dear—and I had the feeling that I could influence him for good, but”—she seemed unable to find words. John drew her unresisting figure up onto his knee and she buried her face on his shoulder.

“And when you knew of his being hurt——?” he asked at length, with an unsuccessful effort to steady his voice, and putting his face down to hers. “I didn't mean to spy on you, but I came upon you by chance. I heard sobs, and the curtain was too low. I started to go to you, but I hadn't courage somehow to face what I feared was the truth. I didn't want to force your confidence, but I hoped——” Mary had started violently. A sudden realization of all he had felt and concealed, the memory of his avoidance of her since then, and of his altered looks and manner, smote her with full force. She gasped and lifted her face, too full of feeling for him to think of herself.

“Oh, John, if I had only known; if I only hadn't been such a coward! I don't know how to tell you but I *must try*. Perhaps you were *too* chivalrous. Perhaps if you hadn't seemed—so satisfied, and I hadn't begun to feel lonely—well, not exactly lonely—

but"—her eyes sinking suddenly—"you seemed to be getting farther away from me, and I—I remembered how Mr. Chandler had talked to me; and it seemed to me you would never love me like that, and I loved *you* all the time more and more. I got to crying to myself sometimes, and I couldn't tell what ailed me, and now—I know"—her breath was quick; the honest eyes tried to meet his. "I only wanted—*this*." Her face was buried again.

A sudden flash of comprehension left John wordless and made that bandaged hand a hateful thing. It was some time before she turned her face and went on, without lifting it.

"That day at the parish meeting, a girl referred to a notice in the paper, and I heard Mr. Chandler's name and saw a lady hush her up and look toward me. I could hardly wait to get home, and then I saw there was nothing in the *Bulletin* and I went around and got another paper." She paused and gasped at the memory. "It made me feel so terribly, John, and when I got home, I threw myself down and began to cry, and when I got to crying, everything that had been pent up in me for weeks came over me and made me lose all power to control myself. If I only had known that you had seen me! But even then I wouldn't have known how to tell you, and I might only have made matters worse in your mind. I didn't even dare to refer to the news for fear I should break down."

John's lips were eloquent, if wordless. "Oh, my dear love, please *try* to understand," she exclaimed desperately, "*I almost love* Mr. Chandler. I hate

to think of his being so horribly hurt, and unhappy, too. I hate to have him go out of my life and I long to help him somehow, but—" she pressed her face to John's— "I—oh, I would rather be your wife *in prison*, all my life, than live in the *seventh heaven* with anyone else."

CHAPTER XLIII

AN EAVESDROPPER PERFORCE

IT was a superb Sunday in September. Every tree was laden with luxuriant greenness that seemed to feel no fear of an impending autumn, and the pastures which stretched on one side of the country lane were as rich in grass as in early June.

"What a pretty place this is! It's always a pleasure to get where they don't clear away all this roadside growth. The passion for neatness is the ruination of half the country-side to me, especially near the big cities."

It was a man who spoke, while he bent and broke a sprig of half-blown goldenrod—a man whom we recognize as our old friend, Mr. Chandler. He turned to the lady by his side for sympathy as he broke off more of his flower-stem and drew the shortened plume through his buttonhole. She smiled acquiescence.

"This is a private road," she said; "all this is part of the old Hutchinson estate, but it has been a good deal changed. Part has been sold and built on, and the old house was enlarged and altered several years ago. It's just up beyond this wood, and the new house is further along. By the way, you knew Caroline Hutchinson, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said, coloring at a memory invoked,

while his grave eye roamed over the meadow and its grazing cattle, only reluctantly coming back to his companion.

"I forget how long you have been in the wilds, but I dare say you didn't hear of her marriage. It must have been over a year ago."

"I have been away just two years and I know I have missed a lot of news. Letters took a long time to reach me, and my correspondents, except Anna, are few and far between."

"She surprised everybody by marrying a Mr. Raymond, an architect of no special prominence and rather out of her set. To be sure, she has money enough to please herself and she seems as happy as a queen. She has sold the town house and lives in the country all the year round. There's nothing love can't accomplish." She laughed a very pleasant, refined little laugh.

"There, you have a glimpse of the new house! The woods run close up behind it. It's very simple, but awfully attractive and homelike. I think that's Mr. Brown now, leaning on the fence. I don't know him to speak to, but his wife and I have exchanged calls. She's sweet."

Her eyes, intent on the figure leaning on the high gate a short distance ahead of them, did not notice Mr. Chandler's violent start and change of expression. He stopped short as though he would have turned about, and when his companion stopped also and looked curiously around, he was leaning forward with his face from her looking for something in the road.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I have dropped the compass off my watch chain," he answered coolly, but without lifting his head. He had in fact dropped the said compass on his bedroom floor that morning, and, finding its little ring insecure, had left it on his dressing-table. As there seemed no trace of it, the lady suggested their turning back, judging from his disturbed face and heightened color that the loss was important.

But for one moment, while her eyes were bent on the ground, he had scanned the tall figure leaning with such easy enjoyment over the gate, and saw that he held a child. He must see that child! He was only taking a Sunday's walk with a lady, and even if he were recognized, no harm would be done. He was not a coward and he had done this man no wrong. On the contrary, he always felt sure that he had flung Mary straight into her guardian's arms, and he was determined now to discover, if possible, how the match had turned out. It had seemed a prosaic transaction—and in that he had found a poor sort of comfort. Brilliant, beautiful Mary the wife of an ugly, middle-aged man whom she looked on as a second father, was a much more congenial object to his mental vision than Mary the wife of—well "that young Dillwyn," for example.

"It would be a needle in a haystack now," he said, regaining his composure. "I may have lost it before I left the house."

The lady expressed a proper amount of regret and hesitation, and then they moved on.

Mr. Brown was apparently deep in thought. His back was toward them, and he did not seem to hear

their approaching footsteps. To be sure, it was a dirt road and they had stopped talking and were both looking intently at the baby. Its head, covered with soft rings of almost black hair, was presented to them crown first as it hung over its father's shoulder; but having as yet no thoughts of the kind to cause abstraction, it was at once awake to new sounds, and lifted its face, regarding them with unembarrassed curiosity. An unmistakable girl's face. Mr. Chandler's heart seemed to stop beating as he traced Mary, feature for feature, in this miniature edition. But the hair was much too dark and the wide, intelligent eyes were brown.

They had stopped involuntarily—perhaps it was Mr. Chandler who had stopped—and the lady waved her hand gayly to the child and was answered by a bright smile that pulled at the heart-strings of one of the spectators; then, immediately overcome by some emotion which hardly seemed embarrassment, the object of their scrutiny turned and burrowed her little nose in her father's cheek. He turned to her with a kiss and became aware of the two people behind him, who were about to move past.

"I hope we are not trespassing. We have been rewarded by a very pretty picture," the lady said smiling as they went by.

John could not lift his hat, as both he and the baby were bareheaded, but he smiled and made a courteous answer before his eyes fell on the face of the man at her side.

That was not a face easily forgotten, especially when one had such good reason to remember it.

The gray and black eyes encountered each other for a single instant, and Mr. Chandler moved quickly on. John stood clasping the baby to him as though he had been threatened with kidnappers.

"Come, let us go home, my blessing," he said, kissing the back of the head which was turned to watch the pedestrians, but he stood for a long minute, lost in thought, in the middle of the road.

Mr. Chandler's mind and heart were in such a whirl that only a long-established habit of manners and conversation enabled him to eat his luncheon and chat on indifferent subjects without giving rise to comment. He was but lately arrived from his long wanderings in Asia and Africa, and had discovered only that Mr. and Mrs. Brown were no longer living in the city. As he had hesitated to speak of Mary to the people who could have given him most definite information, and as he was, moreover, slow to take up the threads of a time so full of pain—the pain that he had tried to run away from—he had been glad to ignore the past. It seemed like a stroke of fate that he should come thus unexpectedly upon her new home. Was it adverse or propitious? Adverse it must be. There could be no hope for him of speaking to her under that black eye that had looked into his to-day, and he knew Mary too well to dream of asking her to see him except in her husband's company. He had thought his feeling for her partly cured, there had been such a dull apathy in his heart for a year past; but the sight of the child had stirred up a very tempest of emotion, not all unworthy, in his deepest nature, and he could not go back to

the city without knowing more; without making one effort to see Mary, herself.

He took leave of his host and hostess in the afternoon, saying that he would walk to the station, as the day was so fine and the country so lovely. He had no fixed purpose as yet. He would trust again to fate; but he would help her or force her, if need be.

He found his way back to the lane by the way that he had quitted it. The afternoon light made the green meadows and flickering shadows of the woods even more witching than at noonday. He crossed a wide, shallow, rippling creek on an old stone bridge, and then discovered a trodden path through the woods winding up the hill in the direction in which he felt sure the house must be. He would risk it! If he met John, he would make a manly avowal of his wish to see Mary, since chance had brought him near—and if it should be Mary herself upon whom he should come! His heart was beating so fast that he was forced to stop and recover his breath. When he found himself on the edge of the woods he suddenly saw the back of the house close before him, and halted again, this time to reconnoiter. The tall screen around the drying ground hid his approach; then across a space of open lawn—he saw a white figure pushing a baby carriage. It needed no second look to tell him who it was. No other woman moved like that! She turned the coach and started directly toward him, and he went boldly to meet her. She had raised her eyes and was looking across, but not at him, at someone else who came at that moment off the broad

piazza and went to her. His wonderful chance was gone. He must do something quickly. They would see him if he went back and how should he explain his coming from that quarter. His composure—such as it was—was so completely gone by this time that he knew he could not utter a word. He moved so that a tree came between him and them and walked on trying to get his breath back and think what was to be done. The realization came to him as he heard their voices close to him on the other side of his screen, that he had cut himself off from any straightforward program. He must hide in those thick spruce boughs. There was no help for it! It was a large tree in the prime of life, close by the end of the piazza—no newly planted one. He would risk it. If he was caught he would confess all: he had never been a burglar, with all his sins, he thought bitterly.

They were so close to him that he only dared peep with caution and was obliged to make every movement noiseless. "She is getting too heavy for you to carry, Mary!" What a good voice Mr. Brown had!

"Nonsense," came the light response. It thrilled him through and through. "I'd have to be a good deal weaker than I am before I would give up carrying you, my precious. Why, John, I'm ever so much stronger than Anna, really."

Mr. Chandler had only seen glimpses of white through the thick branches of the tree, but his improvised peep-hole brought them into full view as they came up onto the piazza, and not a word could escape him. Passion blinded him for the moment to the part he was playing. He thought they were

felt that she was moved, and Mr. Chandler blessed her for the soft color that suffused her face, and the grave sweetness with which she received news of him. She was not troubled, but she was somewhat excited, as women generally are at the mention of the man who has once loved them.

"John," she said solemnly, "I always felt something fine and uncommon in him in spite of everything. It wasn't only that he fascinated me as they say he does all women. It was because he showed me a side that everyone didn't see. You don't believe it?" as John only made an inarticulate sound, "but I am sure, this time, I can judge better than you. Women often go by intuition instead of evidence, and sometimes it is more to be trusted." She leaned her head back, her eyes on the sky: "He loved what was best in me—not only my looks—and I am sure if I had married him he would not have been unfaithful to me."

John looked gravely down at her. "My darling, I am ashamed of hating so to hear you praise him," he said. "I ought not to be mean enough to grudge him your good opinion when I have so much!"

"And you don't believe I am right?"

He rose up with his double burden preparatory to moving in through the open window, but stood looking down at her wistful, insistent face.

"Well, perhaps you may be. I can't imagine anybody who had loved you ever looking twice at anyone else."

* * * * *

When, under cover of darkness, Mr. Chandler ventured from his hiding place and started for the

station his heart was too full to feel shame at the tears on his cheeks or at the despicable part he had been playing. He had a sense of having been led into his eavesdropping.

"She has chosen the better part," he said to himself, unconscious that he was quoting words spoken by august lips of another Mary. "And if there is any manhood left in me, I will deserve her good opinion. At least, I will never be unfaithful to her!"

CONCLUSION

IN WHICH AN OLD FRIEND THINKS ALOUD

“OH, Mrs. Wharton, it is so good to have you back! There is nobody I can talk to as I do to you, and my heart has been so heavy with John’s troubles! It is a tremendous thing to separate from your church when you have loved it as John has, and have worshiped in it all your life. You know how he clings to old associations and hates change unless it really stands for a principle or some important gain. And he will be fifty-two to-morrow.”

“Will he, really?” Mrs. Wharton exclaimed. “Well, of course he will, for I shall be *seventy-two* myself this summer.” She said it with a sigh, but it did not seem to rest heavily on her mind. She looked a very vigorous old lady and had just returned from a journey to the far East which would have tried the mettle of most *young* women.

“It doesn’t seem to me that John looks a day older than when I first came into his charge,” Mary said thoughtfully: “He’s a good deal stouter—or I ought to say less thin, for it isn’t in him ever to be stout—and his hair is getting very gray at the temples. Only think, I’m just the age now that John was when Father died! He seemed almost old to me then, and I feel so young!”

"And look so," Mrs. Wharton said, lifting her eyes from her knitting to follow the active, graceful figure that started in pursuit of her youngest "hopeful," who had climbed onto a stool and was preparing to pull the lamp off the table.

"No, *no*, Catharine!" trying to make her voice and face as grave as possible, and looking straight into the bright, impenitent eyes of the little mischief. "Oh, dear, one needs the patience of Job, and I haven't got it. I will ask Catharine to keep her while I have a quiet hour with you. She never seems to tire of her society, but now that she can walk, she is what John Patterson calls 'stirring.'"

"John Patterson seems as hearty as ever," Mrs. Wharton said, as Mary came back from her embassy with empty arms and seated herself in her favorite low Shaker chair with a piece of sewing. "He must miss Hannah very much; but he is so wrapped up in this family that his own personal ties are almost secondary."

"The children all love him dearly," Mary said, applying her button-hole scissors to the little dress in her hands. "Sometimes I think he and Catharine get a little bit jealous of each other, but John always smooths things out and makes them both feel happy. Dear John!" with sudden tears in the eyes she raised from her work.

"I have been full of sympathy with what you have written me, and I'm so anxious to hear more," Mrs. Wharton said, with voice and face that bore her out in both assertions.

"I couldn't write much about it, even to you;

at least, not till it was settled; but it has all been coming for a long time. John's conscience has been growing steadily more and more uncomfortable; for he felt he did not believe the Creeds even as he used to, and especially that one article that has been causing all this controversy. John came long ago to accept my opinion about the Virgin Birth, but it was such a sacred subject he hated to hear it bandied about, and he thought he could go on being a good Churchman and leaving that out when he said the Creed. He never taught in the Sunday-school, you know, and we don't teach the children more about doctrine than is absolutely necessary. It was only when he found other men being so severely criticised for the same 'heresy,' and now this trial of Dr. ——— and the general feeling against him! That has made John feel he couldn't keep quiet any longer."

Mrs. Wharton only nodded with lips pressed together. The full lower one protruded more than it used, and made her little grimace, when anything moved her strongly, a trifle grimmer.

"The thing that has kept him so long undecided what to do is the children."

Mrs. Wharton only looked her interest.

"You know the family 'Creed' has always been that if 'Father' disagrees with anyone or disapproves anything, that person or thing must be wrong. John knows that nothing his humility could urge would ever change it."

"And who is responsible for such a state of things, I wonder?"

Mary smiled and colored slightly, but the subject

was too grave a one for self-consciousness. "Oh, children's estimates of their elders are wonderfully intelligent in the long run," she said with quiet conviction. "And, indeed, I wouldn't feel it right to *teach* them that their father was infallible. He thinks he has been cowardly not to have made a definite decision long before, but when we have talked the matter over, I have tried my best to keep him from doing anything irrevocable, though I dare say people will think his going out is all due to my influence."

"It has certainly been your *influence* if not your will," Mrs. Wharton said, with an unusually tender smile on her rugged face.

"Children are a big responsibility," Mary went on, only half heeding. "When John wanted me to join this Meeting because we enjoy going there, and to make the children members, I wouldn't consent because I have always hoped that the wave of more liberal feeling would alter the Creeds some day or make it possible to join the church with reservations."

"Ah!" Mrs. Wharton gave a deep-drawn sigh.

"I suppose it was a childish hope," Mary said sadly, "but there *has* been a great wave of revolt from dogma, and no one knows how much I have wanted to belong with John; to have us all belong together." The choke in her voice compelled a pause. "I feel sure the time will come when church membership will not be dependent on uniformity of belief, but on likeness of ideals and purpose," she went on; "but we may never live to see it, and it is a sad time we are going through now."

"I have often wondered whether the Friends hadn't fulfilled their mission in the world," Mrs. Wharton answered. "But it seems as though they were needed so long as nearly every church keeps fenced in with doctrine. Do the children know anything about their father's leaving?" she added in a different tone. "Of course the little ones wouldn't?"

"Yes, the older ones do, even Dick, though, of course, they're too young to understand the reasons. Janet asked me years ago why none of us stayed for Communion but Father, and when I said we weren't members of the church, she seemed satisfied. I suppose she thought people were born church-members as they were born Americans, and that was all there was about it; but last year George's George was confirmed, and of course he talked about it to Laddie and Lassie, and they went to the service." (Laddie and Lassie are the twins, entered in the family Bible as John and Mary.)

"I suppose they are as inseparable a trio as ever?"

"Oh, more so, if possible, and Lassie told me George said she and Laddie could join the church if they wanted to, and they had decided they did. She looked up at me very wistfully and said, "Mother, if we could join, why couldn't you? It seems lonely for Father to be the only one who is a *really* Episcopalian. I tried to explain that I couldn't quite believe what was necessary to say to become a church member, but I saw I was on thin ice. She took me up at once. 'But you believe just like *Father*, don't you?' I felt as though I were about to be weighed in the balance, and I assured her that Father and I

believed almost exactly alike, and, as that very naturally puzzled her, I made a lame attempt to explain that it was different going into the church from being brought up in it."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She grasped me round the neck and kissed me over and over; I think she felt I was in need of all the sympathy she could show; but she never said another word. In the evening she and Laddie both perched up on John's knees and commenced to ask his approval. I saw him get very white, and his lips trembled, but he only said he wanted them to wait till they were older and could understand better what it meant to join church. We both feel that little George is quite too young, but Caroline says she wasn't thirteen when she was confirmed. Then, their children have gone to Sunday-school and are well up in the catechism. They are such nice children! But Caroline says it is very hard on her living alongside of us and having George think everything we do is perfect. She says her family 'could never be governed on the Junior Republic plan, and our children are remarkable.' "

"Caroline always bears her trials good-naturedly," Mrs. Wharton said, laughing; "and the last time I saw George, he looked pretty well satisfied with his lot. But," she added, in quite another voice, "I met Mr. Chandler at the station this morning, and he agreed with me that this household was about as near the Kingdom of Heaven as one could ever find on this earth. He looked very well and happy. I told him I had heard a great deal about him, not only

from your letters and John's, but from all the children's. I was thinking as I came out what a wonderful change you have made in his life. How long ago was it that John brought him out?"

"Oh, more than ten years! It was just when Laddie and Lassie were beginning to walk," Mary answered, consulting the Mother's Standard Dictionary of Dates, which never fails; "don't you remember, they saw their father coming and both started out for him and fell down and commenced to cry. Dear little souls, they didn't know that they had saved a very painful situation, and John broke the rest of the ice by saying: 'Mr. Chandler, I wouldn't have dared bring you out if I had known what an upsetting effect you would have on my family.' He said afterward that 'it was a bad pun in a good cause,' but I thought it was a pretty good pun, too."

"Oh, yes! It all comes back to me now; I can see your face when you saw them coming across the orchard." Mrs. Wharton was very fond of reminiscing.

"He made a clean breast of everything to John, and they have surely been firm friends ever since; and if we have done him good, he has been a sort of fairy godfather to the children. Do you know we are going to let him take Janet to Europe this summer? Mrs. Townsend is very much pleased about it too!"

"*Your little Janet!*" Mrs. Wharton actually gasped.

"Yes," Mary said, smiling in spite of an obtrusive drop or two. "John offered it because he overheard a conversation between Mr. Chandler and Jane. I never saw anyone more touched. He told us then

that it was his fiftieth birthday (it seems to be a season of birthdays) and he said in all his half century he had never had such a present as that." Mary stopped a moment and swallowed hard at the recollection. "Mrs. Townsend was out yesterday in her new automobile and she promised to mother Janet to the best of her ability. She has been lovely with all the children, but she is especially fond of Janet. The child is wild to go"—Mary could not repress a little sigh—"she would go anywhere with Mr. Chandler, but she does seem very young to go without us."

"I should think Mrs. Townsend would do anything in the world for you. She knows what her brother was and what he is." Mrs. Wharton was forgetting to knit on the strength of this news. "She is too proud a woman to acknowledge in words all she owes you and John; but her manner and face tell enough. There isn't one man in a thousand who could have acted as John did"—taking up her needles again—"but he knew his wife!"

"Oh, there he comes!" Mary said, rising quickly and going into the hall.

Mrs. Wharton heard a hubbub of childish voices, and looking from the window, she saw John coming across the orchard, as on the day just recalled, the center of an eager group.

Children clung to his hands, bestrode his neck and got closer than free locomotion permitted. Mrs. Wharton would not follow Mary to the hall door to greet him. He would have news for her alone and should have her to himself for a few moments—if that were possible of accomplishment. She saw him

detach himself from the children as his eye caught sight of his wife at the door. She did not move as she heard them come into the hall together, but a treacherous mirror gave an unsought and unavoidable picture.

"She will make up to him for everything he can lose or suffer!" was her heart-felt exclamation. She has never cured herself of the trick of thinking aloud.

* * * * *

In the privacy of her own room that night, she sat long by Grandma Farnham's old four-poster, in Grandma Farnham's easy chair, with reminders of the past on every side. At last she adjusted her spectacles and opened her Bible aimlessly and absently. Her eye rested on these words:

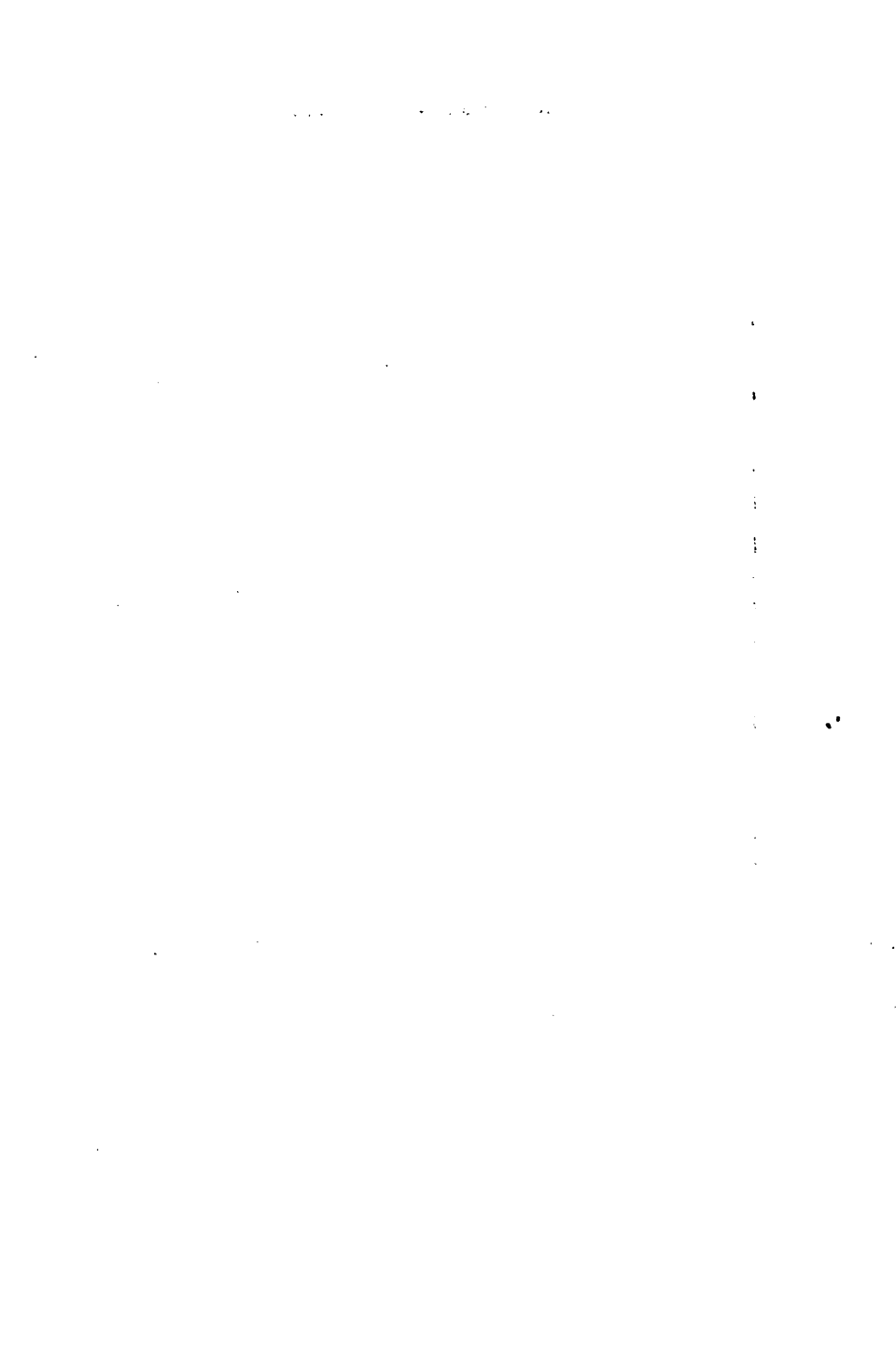
I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

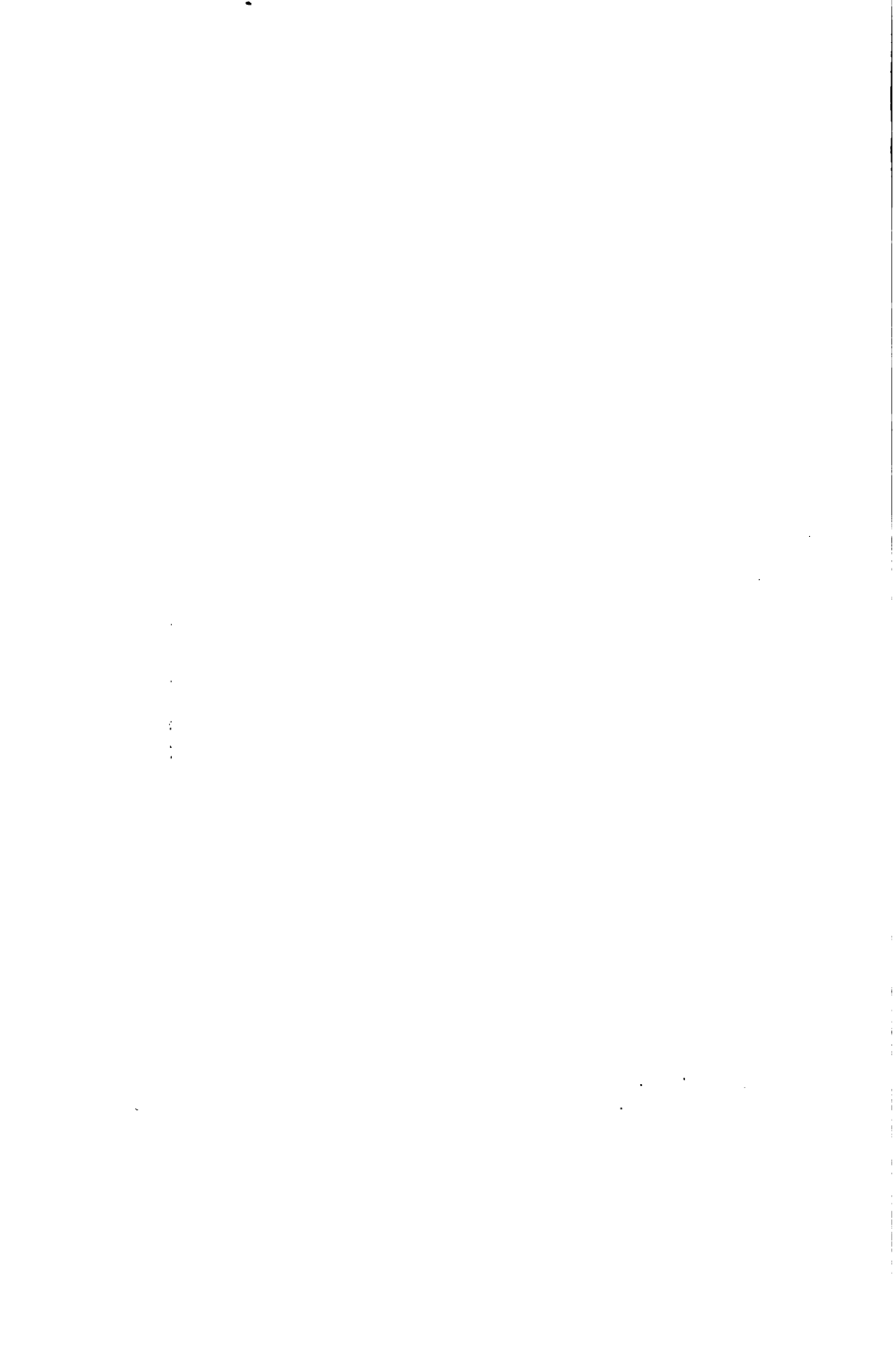
And if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

The Book slipped from her hands and her somber eyes were fixed on space. "And His followers have been hunting heresy ever since," she said in her strong, emphatic voice.

The quiet bedroom confidences going on in another room were suddenly interrupted by the sound of scurrying bare feet in the dark, and the big bed was hastily invaded.

"Father," an awestruck little voice whispered from its safe shelter: "Somebody's talkin'."







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